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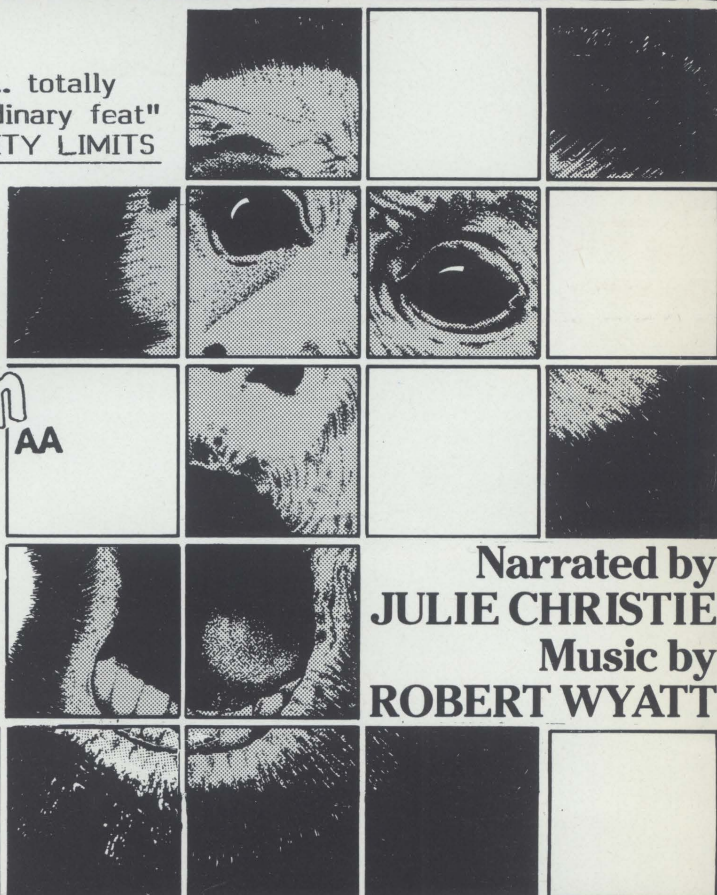
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SIGHT & SOUND

INTERNATIONAL FILM QUARTERLY · WINTER 1982/83 · VOLUME 52 No 1

SIGHT AND SOUND is an independent critical magazine sponsored and published by the British Film Institute. It is not an organ for the expression of official BFI policy: signed articles represent the views of their authors.



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On the cover:
Antonioni's
'Identification of a Woman'.

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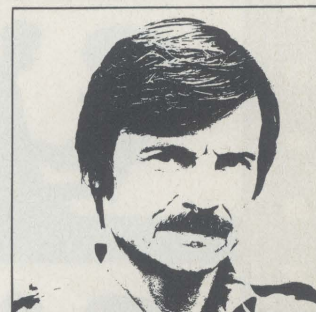
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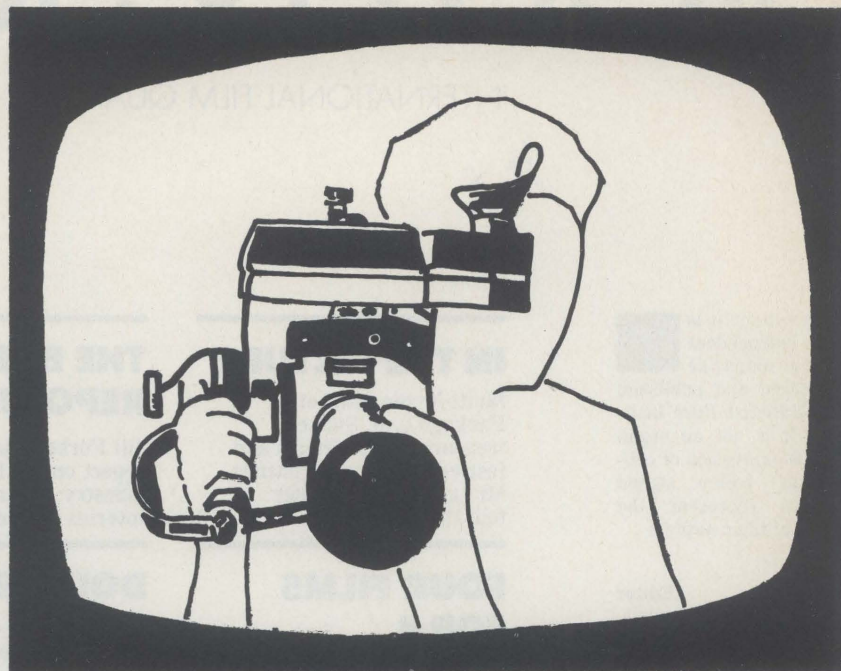
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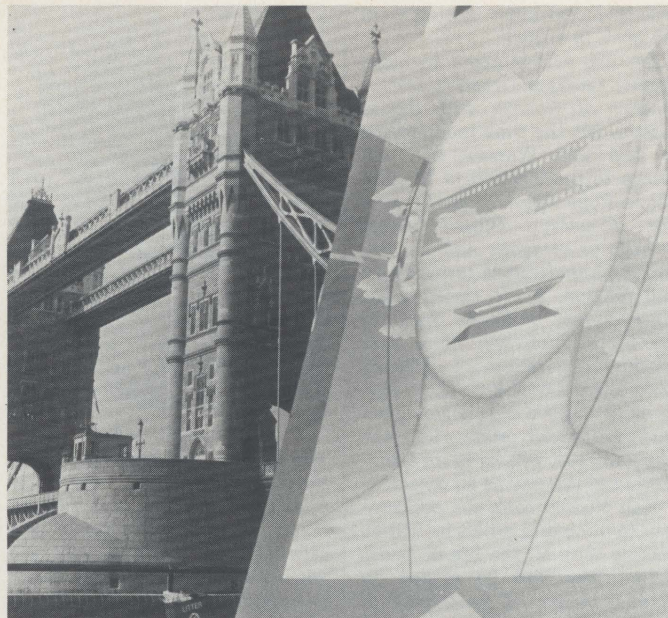
Not Another Market

For five days last autumn, 2,200 film, TV and video programme buyers and sellers were in London at Britain's (and the world's) first Multi-Media Market. Karol Kulik, its Director, reflects on the event

Two questions have pursued me throughout the past eighteen months. Many times posed by trade journalists, they were more often raised by the people to whom we were selling the idea of participating in the London Multi-Media Market. Why another market, they would ask, and/or why has it taken Britain so long to organise such a trade fair?

In 1981 there were no fewer than fourteen international markets, starting with Manila in January and ending with the Western Cable Show in California in December. Some have become integral parts of existing festivals (Berlin and Cannes for example); others are run in conjunction with annual conferences and seminars (like NATPE). All have a primary function as specialised trade fairs where distributors and exhibitors (and sometimes producers) meet to screen product, to buy and sell or discuss future product deals for a particular medium. If you were interested in buying major commercial films for theatrical release, you would have at least two definite and five possible markets to choose from. If you were after TV rights to features, you'd add another market or two as well as a few festivals. If, however, you were seeking product for a cable network, you might well have reason to attend all the existing markets, buying TV programmes at certain events, feature films and home video material at others. As the breadth of product expands, as companies diversify into new areas of exhibition, so more people are forced to attend more markets. As anyone in this position will tell you, and often, and rightly so, there are too many markets. There is not time, money or, in the case of feature films, product enough to sustain all this market-going. Why add another to the calendar?

Much buying and selling is already done by direct contact; more could be done in the less personal way of exchanging letters and video cassettes with no one needing to leave his or her office. But only major companies can afford extensive sales teams (and we are seeing many companies cutting back in this area), and the importance of face to face contact with existing clients and the possibility of meeting new clients from perhaps unexpected quar-



Poster for the London Multi-Media Market.

ters make international meeting places in one venue over a short period a valuable commodity.

The 35 British companies who established the London Multi-Media Market in May 1981 were well aware of these arguments. (Britain has the second largest delegation at most markets, after the Americans.) What they foresaw was the way in which the developments in the media would lead us into a new kind of marketplace, one where whatever you sought you would be able to do your business at one event. Certain other markets are now trying to embrace a portion of the new media interests. The London Market was the first to put its faith firmly in the overlap created among the film, TV and video worlds. As a multi-media market where buyers and sellers can do all their business whether in cinema release, broadcast television, cable TV, home video or satellite, the LMMM aims to be not just another market, but an alternative market.

It has not been easy persuading companies around the world of the benefit of this approach, used, as they are, to specialised markets where 'their' medium dominates; but the first Market did convert or begin to convert enough people to justify itself. Having given ourselves three years to establish the LMMM as the premiere autumn marketing event, we did achieve more in the first year than we expected. Attracting 2,200 participants from fifty-eight countries represents surely the best turnout for any such first-time effort. The Market was held in the Tower Hotel at St Katharine's Dock with two and a half floors of the hotel used as 'offices' equipped with meeting areas and video players and monitors. Registration fees were kept to a minimum (£25 as compared with other markets' £40 to over £300).

The Guide to the Market which we produced for delegates was complemented by a market 'first', our own closed-circuit TV channel which ran from 7.30 a.m. till 6 p.m., giving market, industry and world news, plus interviews and advertising.

One comes back to the question of why it has taken Britain so long to launch itself on the international marketplace. The reason, I believe, stems from the wider problem which has faced British industry as a whole over the past three decades, namely reluctance to recognise that aggressive promotion and selling are vital to growth, especially given the competition of active selling nations like America and Japan. In the heady days of the Interim Action Committee and the British Film Authority debate, I co-wrote a paper as part of a campaign to get the Government to establish a 'British Film Marketing Agency' in which we said: 'The Australians have shown how a series of well-planned PR campaigns at the Cannes Film Festival can break down the resistance to Australian films in just three years. We as a nation, because of our past glories, probably don't encounter this kind of resistance, but after many years of dwindling film production we do tend to be discounted ... and a co-ordinated effort to promote British films of quality at international events would undoubtedly help sales—provided we have some films to sell.'

It was Government apathy towards our campaign and internal friction among the campaigners which led a small group of us (including Clare Downs, then one of the heads of AIP, Adam Leys of the COI, Derek Hill in his pre-Channel 4 days, Sid Brooks, head of IFDA, Hilary Sandison, a sales agent, and myself, then employed at the National Film School) to float the

idea of establishing a 'market-place' where producers could screen their product to distributors. We decided to stop writing papers and actually do something. Starting in October 1978, we ran a series of small, domestic film markets first at London's Scala Cinema, then at BAFTA. The organisers of these events joined forces in 1980 with James Ferman, the British Film Censor, who had been single-handedly canvassing for support for a big British film event among major companies. The immediate by-product was the 1980 London Film and Video Market; the end result was the London Multi-Media Market.

The rider 'provided we have some films to sell' has direct relevance to one of the four major problems with which we still have to contend. Only about 25 per cent of the first Market's business was related to features, and much of this was in video rights sales. Even with eleven 35mm cinemas available for screenings, very few films were shown, partly because not all the cinemas were 'on site', but mainly because film companies were not yet convinced of the value of the Market, or did not have product to screen, or product ready to screen. We have much work to do in providing the right facilities and further pursuing the film producers and distributors if we want to keep the Market truly 'multi-media'. Whether in the long term the Market settles down to being a TV and video event, building on the areas best represented in year one, or succeeds in bridging the media, only time will tell.

Leading on from there, our other main tasks are finding a good long-term venue, selling the second Market with even greater skill and resolve, and generating the necessary finance to develop a strong operational base. To launch the first Market we formed a trade association, the London Screen Market Association, which to date has sixty-five members representing all aspects of our industries. Their subscriptions (of £3,000 or £1,000 or £100) plus the major sponsorship of EMI Films, the Rank Organisation and the Greater London Council raised about a third of the needed revenue. Our goal is to be self-financing after three years, but in the meantime we still need to attract as much sponsorship revenue as possible to keep participation costs competitive and to provide incentives to those key buyers whom we want to attend the Market in 1983.

The Market's 'organisation' has received numerous bouquets in the trade press, and I would like to hand them over now to the hundred people who worked for the Market, many of whom as film school students this year will be Market participants next year.

KAROL KULIK

IN THE PICTURE

Package tour

Eighteen film-makers for eighteen European cities

The Italian producer Giacomo Pezzali, on behalf of his Transworld Film, announced a project in Venice last October for a series of 18 films devoted to 'European cultural capitals', a package deal in which most of the European television networks are collaborating with the third channel of the Italian network RAI. Each country which takes part in the project finances the documentary on its own capital, and will receive a free package of 6 (or 9) of the other documentaries. The 18 films will include: Angelopoulos on Athens, Jancsó on Budapest, Schroeter on West Berlin, Manoel de Oliveira on Lisbon, Zanussi on the Vatican City, Ken Russell on Edinburgh, Lindsay Anderson on London, Olmi on Milan, Chabrol on Paris, Jiri Menzel on Prague, Jan Troell on Stockholm, Luis Berlanga on Toledo, Ilia Averbakh on Leningrad (after the Russians had refused to agree to Tarkovsky on Moscow), Peter Hajek on Vienna and Vatroslav Mimica on Zagreb. Each film will be an hour long, made at a cost of about £25,000 (with the exception of Ken Russell's, which will cost in the region of £70,000) and they are scheduled for European television release in autumn 1983.

The first film of the series, on Venice, has already been completed by Carlo Lizzani, director of the Venice Festival, and was previewed at a press conference during the screenings for the Italia Prize for tv. It deals with 'Venice as an Italian and European capital at a time when the world, having verified the illusoriness of total development and production as a philosophy of existence, is starting to discover culture as a mainspring of civilisation.'

Ermanno Olmi will begin the Milan film soon, having decided not to reduce the 3½ hour length of his new film, *Cammina, Cammina*, which is ready for release. 'It's no accident that I've chosen Milan, since I've lived there and was brought up there, which means I won't be making a detached picture. My film will concentrate on the city as a body and soul.' Schroeter's film will look at West Berlin through the eyes of a young Turkish immigrant. Angelopoulos will present his film from the point of view of three historical characters from different epochs who visit the Acropolis: 'It will only be a documentary up to a certain point—the rest will involve fantasy and imagination. The Athens of today is ugly, sad and squalid, and I have to work hard to find reasons to love it. I'll use images of present-day Athens with a soundtrack which relates back to the

Athens I remember, dating from my birth in 1936.'

Zanussi, who is about to begin filming Graham Greene's *Doctor Fischer of Geneva* with James Mason, felt the time inopportune to deal with Warsaw, and will return to the location of his film about Pope John Paul, *From a Far Country*. 'The Vatican belongs to everyone and no one, and it's important in terms of art and religion. It's a closed state, however, and won't be open for my film, which will be a very cautious operation. I already know it's impossible to show anything of the life of this small but very important state, but the film's interest will lie in its examination of the city as an object.'

Ken Russell took the opportunity to announce a film he will be making soon on the life of Maria Callas, who will be played by Sophia Loren: 'a biography of Callas made in the manner of a thriller without an ending.' Russell chose Edinburgh instead of London because 'London is the city which held me prisoner for twenty-five years, whereas Edinburgh is the nearest city to where I live now, and I like its mysterious and fantastic aspects. There'll be a lot of music, even *Lucia di Lammermoor* played on the bagpipes, as I'm much more committed to opera now than to cinema. My film won't be one of those sparse and realistic documentaries, it will have a few altered states.'

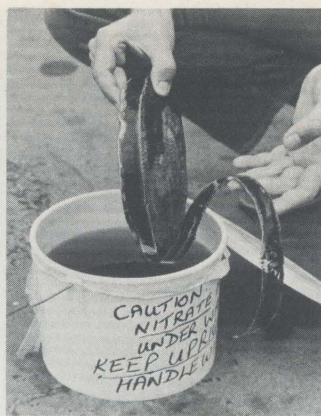
TONY MITCHELL

Sunken treasure

The 'Lusitania' yields an archaeological curiosity

Film archivists get used to finding films in unlikely places. A few years ago the National Film Archive was handed a couple of reels of silent Hollywood nude-starlet footage dug up, alongside a First World War hand grenade, from a Hampstead garden. More recently, major discoveries have been made in locations as diverse as the Yukon permafrost of Dawson City and a Jesuit abbey in Switzerland. Film archiving often seems closely akin to archaeology.

Even the longest-serving practitioners of the craft, however, expressed surprise when, last September, divers carrying out salvage work on the liner 'Lusitania' (sunk by a German torpedo ten miles off the coast of Ireland on 7 May 1915) brought to the surface a reel of film. What it in fact looked like was a sodden lump of coal, but once some of the silt had been cleared away, the celluloid was plain to see, complete with an intact image and a few surviving perforations. BBC's *Newsnight*—on site to cover the 'Lusitania' salvage story, partly to ascertain



Salvage work.

whether or not the liner was carrying munitions, which it apparently was—realised it had a bonus scoop on its hands and called in Laurie Ward, then the BBC's technical advisor at Kay's Laboratories and a well-known whizz at restoring damaged film.

Laurie Ward succeeded in recovering a portion of the eroded reel, sufficient to reveal a number of complete images and, by good fortune, the film's title, *The Carpet from Bagdad*, an American five-reeler produced by the Selig company in 1915. A missing masterpiece? Luckily no, say the silent cinema experts (despite a hype review in the *British Bioscope* of 9 December 1915, which called it 'a difficult production to submit to the ordinary process of criticism, for it is less of a film drama than a series of gorgeous tableaux, fascinating, almost bewildering, in their vivid orientalism, their crowded animated scenes of native life and customs'), for there is no chance of the surviving footage being put back into projectable form. Further work at the National Film Archive has led to the recovery of a few more image-bearing feet, but they will remain an archaeological curiosity, preserved as a freakish footnote to a larger piece of history.

Why *The Carpet from Bagdad* was travelling on the 'Lusitania' is a minor mystery. There was, oddly enough, a cinema on the liner—perhaps it was the in-cruise movie? More likely, it was being brought to Britain for preview purposes, since the film was not registered for copyright in the USA until a week after the sinking, and not shown in the UK until the end of the year. It is known that at least three cinema executives were travelling on the ship—an American, Charles Frohman, of the Famous Players Film Company, who died, and two Britons, E. Hounsell and Edward Barry, who escaped.

The film archiving world now awaits with bated breath the source of the next movie discovery. Perhaps Prince Charles, as patron of the BFI, should make a closer inspection of the 'Mary Rose'?

CLYDE JEAVONS

Spain

Spanish directors are still exploring the recent past

Although no Spanish films competed at Berlin or Cannes in 1982, interesting films still manage to be made. The lack of even a modest industrial structure has been countered by a scheme whereby films can be financed by RTVE, Radio Television Espanola, which has the right to show them after two years' exploitation in cinemas. *La Colmena* (*The Hive*), for instance, has been produced by Agata Films (20 per cent) and RTVE (80 per cent). The budget was 90 million pesetas, nearly £500,000, an unheard of sum for a Spanish film.

La Colmena was the second novel of Camilo José Cela (his first, *La Familia de Pascual Duarte*, was filmed by Ricardo Franco in 1975). *La Colmena*, which censorship forced to be published first in Argentina in 1951, is a grim fresco of the *bas fondos* of Madrid in the early 1940s. The script had to prune the novel but its desolate spirit has been preserved; a star-studded cast aids the audience's identification with sixty characters, reduced from the book's 296. The director is Mario Camus, who has long had a reputation as a discerning adaptor of novels, and the exactness of the reconstruction and impeccable acting make *La Colmena* a considerable achievement. It opened in Madrid nine years almost to the day after *The Spirit of the Beehive*, also set in the 1940s, also showing the numbing aftermath of Franco's victory.

The still necessary recuperation of Spanish history is not of course the only possible *donnée*. The young director Pedro Almodovar, for instance, is firmly rooted in the present. His first film, *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas de monton*, (*Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Ordinary Girls*) thrust on to the screen the drugs and pop culture of Madrid of the late 1970s. Crude in image and language, its ruthless bad taste and humour were bracing; amorality had at last hit the Spanish cinema. *Pepi* was shot sporadically, when money permitted. But Almodovar's second film, *Laberinto de Pasiones*, was produced by Musidora, owners of the excellent Alphaville minicines, which have shown most of the best films seen in Madrid over the last four years, all in original language with subtitles. The budget of 20 million pesetas, about £100,000, included the service of Martin Müller, Wim Wenders' habitual sound recordist, and the film gives another delirious, blatantly amoral, picture of Madrid. One shocked exhibitor refused to handle it only a few days before it was due to open; the Alphaville, however, was able to give it pride of place.

Javier Aguirre's *Vida/Perra* is the film for which Esperanza Roy received the best actress award at Venice in 1982. Aguirre's career began in 1964 with a notable documentary, *Espana Insolita*, but his twenty-odd films since then have included titles like *Leg Growing*, *Skirt Diminishing*, *The Great Love of Count Dracula*, *Wife by Day, Lover by Night*. At the same time, however, he has made a series of experimental shorts which he calls collectively 'Anti-Cine'. *Vida/Perra* is an adaptation of the novel *La Vida Perra de Juanita Narboni* by the sadly neglected Angel Vázquez (1929-1980). It is the monologue of a middle-aged virgin who knows that it is 'too late to sin' and who ekes out her loneliness with recollections and imaginary conversations. At the end, unable to remember her mother's face or voice and so free at last from the cause of her misery, she is borne like some Beckett solitary into limbo. The novel is set in Tangier, its author's birthplace, and written in its extraordinary blend of Sephardic and Andalusian idioms, but this has been jettisoned by Aguirre, who is concerned to place the monologue in a neutral setting so that it has the widest possible appeal. Although the film had an intellectual success, its popularity is by no means assured, but at the least it should have the merit of sending people back to the novel.

Demonios en el Jardin (*Demons in the Garden*) is another exploration of the past by Manuel Gutierrez Aragon. It is set in the same period, the post-Civil War years of the black market and repression, as the epic *El Corazon del Bosque* (*The Heart of the Forest*) but lacks that film's Breughel-like intensity. Although it boasts the first appearance together of the two biggest current stars of the Spanish cinema, Ana Belen and Angela Molina, it is possible to feel that Gutierrez Aragon should not have opened the cupboard of family skeletons that Saura still delights in twitching into life.

The most eagerly awaited film is the two-part documentary *Despues de ...* (*Afterwards*), by Cecilia and Juan José Bartolomé, on the years since Franco's death in November 1975. The film was shown at San Sebastian in 1981, but its release has been delayed, though what political or ministerial pressures may have been involved has not been revealed. Another documentary, *Rocio*, about the eponymous pilgrimage and fiesta in Andalusia, unearthed some unsavoury incidents in and after the Civil War. A court banned the film unless cuts were made, which the director refused, after a case brought by the son of an apparent assassin whose 'good name' the film is thought to bring into disrepute. The director was sentenced to two and half months imprisonment, fined £250 and

ordered to pay £50,000 compensation to the injured party. So much for freedom of speech.

Yet there are grounds for optimism. The biggest grossing film in Spain in 1981 was not *Superman II* or *The Blue Lagoon* but Pilar Miro's excellent *El Crimen de Cuenca*. Borau and Erice are said to be preparing films. The release last year of *La Batalla del Porro* (*The Battle of the Joint*), the sequel to *The Joint Draft*, showed that at last it is possible to make fun of military service. That, in a country beset by rumours of coups d'état, is something.

ROGER MORTIMORE

Shorts and festivals

The National Panel for Film Festivals recently dissolved itself. Will its work continue unchanged?

As it is better to do things by halves than not at all, no one has ever questioned the limitations of the National Panel for Film Festivals. It was established in 1966, when a British government actually believed that: 'The selection of first class films to represent the United Kingdom at major international festivals is a matter of great importance for this country's trade and prestige, and it is most desirable that the selection should be entrusted to a strong and representative committee.' Although length was never strictly specified, this brief was meant to apply to short films. Short films needed, and still need, the most help.

The work of gathering the films, screening them for the panel, which has been chaired throughout by James Quinn, and making arrangements with festivals has been done by a small secretariat, supported and housed

by the British Council. One of the secretary's tasks was to make sure that, in their many enthusiasms, the panel did not contravene or ignore British Council policy. But successive secretaries (John Stapleton, Mary-Jane Walsh, Christian Routh and Una Hurdling) all tried to broaden its policy and extend their own burdens. When a film deserved special consideration, their tape-measures became quite elastic, as with *My Childhood* by Bill Douglas, or Peter Greenaway's *The Falls*. Experience of festival juries (and of the unworldliness of film-makers) has accrued over 16 years, and British films have been shuffled around the world to their advantage. Enough prizes, awards and certificates were brought home to sustain patriotic pride.

Quite apart from a cash prize or some peculiar object in metal, wood or plastic, film-makers can gain from taking part in festivals, and the Panel encouraged them to be there and to see their films in an international context. When they recover from this, they can make contacts, and there is always a chance of distribution, or television sales. Also, when festival directors come to London, they are enabled to see a batch of short films, sensibly selected.

As films were never finished all at the same time, and festivals were dotted around the calendar, the 'strong and representative committee' seldom saw all the films, and their function changed from selecting films to advising the secretary on specific problems or exploring new festivals. In addition to official members from the British Council and the Foreign Office, several were semi-official, coming from organisations like arts associations, film schools or funding bodies. Not only is this useful in cutting through administrative tangles and making reciprocal arrangements, but it ensures a quorum. Freelance film-makers, critics and distributors

cannot always afford to give up their time for long meetings or regular viewing sessions.

So it should not be surprising that there were only eight members present when the director of the British Council's film department recently moved the dissolution of the National Panel for Film Festivals, and proposed to set up, some time in the future, an advisory board, to match the set-up of the Council's drama, music, dance or library departments. His motion was carried.

The new Board's members would be appointed by the British Council and would still be expected to serve voluntarily. As there isn't an unlimited supply of knowledgeable people who are public spirited enough to attend meetings, many Panel members are likely to be reappointed. But new Board members may bring different pressures to bear on the British Council's attitude to films, and a risk is that they may have other interests to promote: feature films, archives, international catalogues, national film weeks and so on. Without the backing of a prestigious, autonomous committee, totally committed to participation in festivals, the current economic plague may whittle away the secretariat's slender resources. There has never been enough money for publicity, posters or stills, or a proper travel fund to cover all important festivals.

The seven-point proposal from the British Council set out terms of reference for a new Board in a general way, and did not say what would happen to the secretariat. So, in dissolving itself, the Panel felt assured that its work would go on. One member even suggested that the new Board should 'remain fluid until it could define its own boundaries.' No one was indelicate enough to suggest that with inflation and cutbacks there should be safeguards that those boundaries do not shrink.

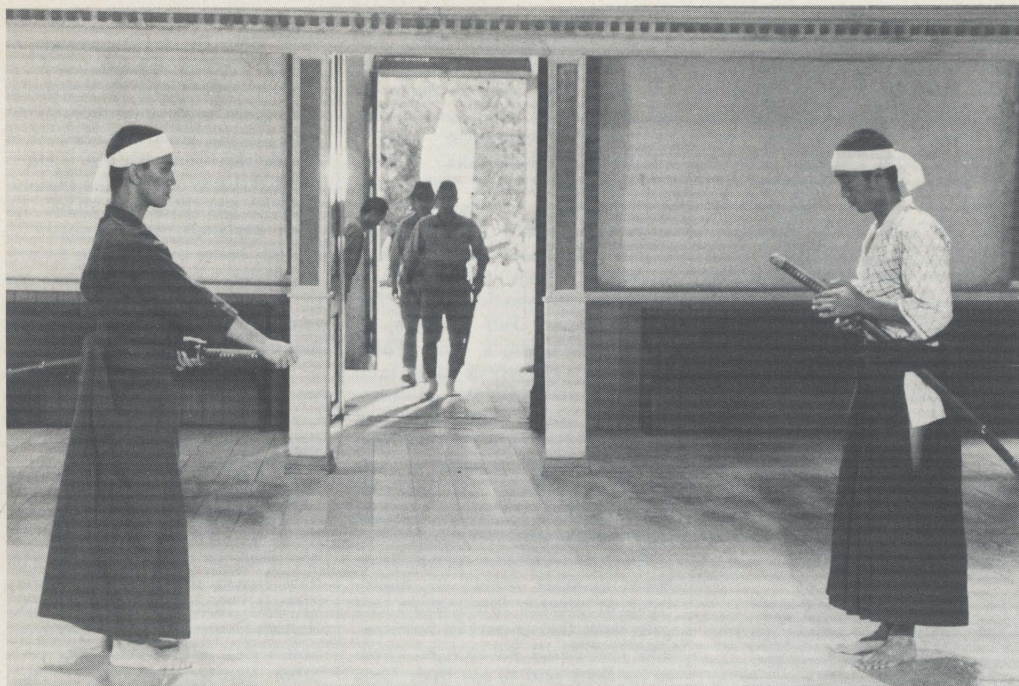
Neither film-makers nor the festivals were informed of the Panel's demise. Of course, as long as the secretariat can go on working as before, they hardly need to know. But without a purpose-built organisation, like the National Film Board of Canada or the Australian Film Commission, it is necessary to ensure that public bodies should not merely express their concern with film, but should do something for British film-makers, and should continue to do so in the future. Festivals should remain in the area of the British Council because most of them happen abroad, but there must remain properly paid and experienced staff in London to ensure that a short film, whether on the vibracular malfunction of polyzoa from pollution, or Granny's day at the seaside, reaches its appropriate festival.

MARI KUTTNA



Mario Camus' *'La Colmena'*.

IN THE PICTURE



'Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence'.

Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence

Van der Post, Oshima and David Bowie

In November 1982, British producer Jeremy Thomas returned from Japan, where he saw for the first time the latest film made by his Recorded Picture Company (*The Shout, Bad Timing, Roeg's* forthcoming *Eureka*). Teaser trailers had already been prepared in Japan, which left no doubt about its main attraction: star David Bowie took second place to director Nagisa Oshima, whose cultural stock one might expect to be fairly high but whose status, according to Thomas, is more glamorous than that. To prove it, he had a Japanese fan magazine, which featured pictures of Oshima in cosy intimacy, including one of him with his wife and, tucked not quite out of sight, a case of whisky. But the peculiarity of *Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence*, a film originated by Oshima but half in English and half in Japanese, with Thomas as sole producer, is that it is about British (and Australian and New Zealand) servicemen in a Japanese prison camp during the last war. It is derived from Laurens van der Post's *The Seed and the Sower*, based on his own experiences as a prisoner of war, with Oshima's script given a final 'polish' by Paul Mayersberg.

Apart from Bowie, the film stars Tom Conti as an observer figure, 'Mr Lawrence' (a transmuted version of the author?), although one would hardly expect the film to be another *Bridge over the River Kwai*, told solely from

the suffering prisoners' point of view. Ryuichi Sakamoto stars as the camp commandant, an actor who looks surprisingly young for the role—although part of the point seems to be that, like their charges, these officers usually were young, an important factor in the clash of codes around which the film revolves. What is harder to see from the pre-release material is what is promised as the 'Japanese' look of the film overall, the point of view that will distinguish it from *River Kwai*, etc. Easier to assess in production terms, and something which has impressed Thomas, was the efficiency of the filming, whether it be peculiarly Japanese or peculiarly Oshima.

Only some 35,000 feet of film was exposed—which would give a shooting ratio as little as 3 or 4 to 1—with hardly any retakes (and then only for technical reasons, not for performances), and without the usual extensive 'coverage' of master shots and different angles. When it came to the editing and post-production, Thomas describes with wonder Oshima's practice of editing 'mute' (cutting the picture by visual rhythm, with the soundtrack dealt with separately). Filming took place in August and September last year, with Raratonga, in the Cook Islands, as the setting for the prison camp, and shooting also in Auckland, New Zealand, of childhood flashbacks for the Bowie character. In fact, *Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence* has been partly financed by New Zealand, and not least of the advantages the production enjoyed was the willingness of the burgeoning talents of the latest 'new' Antipodean cinema to take part, in any capacity, when Big Brother came to town.

RICHARD COMBS

Another ten

The most favoured films? The radio public speaks up

In September, listeners to the BBC's arts programme 'Kaleidoscope' were invited to second guess the world's film critics and predict the results of SIGHT AND SOUND's 1982 Top Ten. (Readers will recall that our fourth ten-yearly poll to determine the world's 'top ten' films was published in October.) Some hundred listeners replied, from as far afield as Dublin and Paris, and two correctly guessed six of the critics' choices.

Citizen Kane, the critics' favourite since 1962, was also the listeners' (38 votes). *Gone With the Wind*, disregarded by the critics, was firmly endorsed by the listeners (21 votes). Third equal (15 votes) were *La Règle du Jeu* and *Battleship Potemkin*; the critics placed them second and fifth respectively. *The Third Man*, one of the critics' runners-up, finished close behind (13 votes). Bogey's enduring popularity and the more recent impact of a rediscovered and refurbished classic were confirmed by the listeners' sixth equal spot: *Casablanca* and *Napoleon* (11 votes each), neither of which showed on the critics' list. The listeners favoured *Stagecoach* (10 votes) over the critics' Ford choice *The Searchers*. Ninth equal (nine votes) were—surprisingly—Lewis Milestone's *All Quiet on the Western Front* and—less surprisingly—the British success story of 1982 *Chariots of Fire*. Also jostling for places were *Les Enfants du Paradis*, *The Godfather*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Sound of Music*, *Modern Times*, *The Birth of a Nation*. JP

1982: Obituary

DECEMBER 1981: Allan Dwan, pioneer director/producer and technical innovator (*The Iron Mask, Sands of Iwo Jima*); Hoagy Carmichael, composer, songwriter ('Stardust') and likeably pawky actor (*The Best Years of Our Lives, To Have and Have Not*); Karl Struss, creative cinematographer (*Sunrise, Journey into Fear*); Irene Howard, sister of Leslie, an actress who became one of the best casting directors in British cinema; Rudolf Prack, romantic Viennese leading man of the 'Heimatfilm' genre in Germany; Yefim Dzigal, Soviet director of biographical and historical films (*We Are from Kronstadt*); Hans Conreid, tall actor specialising in foreign accents, often in Nazi roles (*The 5,000 Fingers of Dr T*).

JANUARY: Penelope Dudley Ward, widow of Carol Reed, English beauty and actress (*The Demi-Paradise, The Way Ahead*); Stanley Holloway, former music-hall performer whose film roles included the Gravedigger in Olivier's *Hamlet* and Dolittle in *My Fair Lady*; Hope Hampton, beauty queen, socialite and leading lady of silent screen (*The Gold Diggers, The Unfair Sex*); Tommy Green, Pinewood's expert at solving foreign location, travel and air freight problems; Victor Buono, heavyweight actor (*Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?, The Strangler*); Margot Grahame, blonde British actress who had a brief Hollywood success in the 30s (*The Informer, The Three Musketeers*); Harvey Lembeck, comic character actor, Sergeant Bilko's sidekick, Rocco, in the television series; Grégoire Aslan, Turkish-born actor from the Paris music-hall, player of comedy character parts (*Mr Arkadin, Our Man in Havana*); Ronald Lewis, handsome Welsh leading man (*Storm Over the Nile, Bachelor of Hearts*); Marcel Camus, French director who favoured exotic locations and won awards for his film of the Rio carnival, *Orfeu Negro*.

FEBRUARY: Eleanor Powell, tap-dancing star of 30s musicals (*Born to Dance, Lady Be Good*); Takashi Shimura, Japanese actor admired as the dying hero of Kurosawa's *Living (Rashomon, Seven Samurai)*; Victor Jory, dignified actor who made an imposing Oberon in Reinhardt's *Dream* but was usually cast as a villain (*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, The Miracle Worker*); John Hay Whitney, industrialist, diplomat, art collector who founded a company to make films in three-colour Technicolor and collaborated with Selznick in setting up *A Star Is Born* and *Gone With the Wind*; Sue Carol Ladd, actress who became an agent and married

Alan Ladd, whose career she managed; Lee Strasberg, Artistic Director of the Actors' Studio who influenced a generation of American players; Virginia Bruce, demure blonde leading lady of the 30s (*The Great Ziegfeld*, *Night Has a Thousand Eyes*).

MARCH: John Belushi, bulky comedy actor whose frenetic style was a hit in *National Lampoon's Animal House* and *The Blues Brothers*; Konrad Wolf, Russian-trained East German director who had a big success with *Sterne* (*Stars*); Alan Badel, stylish actor who moved from romantic leads to versatile character work in film and television (*This Sporting Life*, *The Woman in White*); Diana Napier, red-haired leading lady with Korda in the 30s and widow of Richard Tauber (*Wedding Rehearsal*, *Land Without Music*); George More O'Ferrall, director in film and TV (*The Heart of the Matter*, *The Planemakers*); Harry H. Corbett, classical actor who became typed in Cockney comedy after playing Harold in *Steptoe and Son*; Sam Kydd, chirpy character actor in hundreds of British films, lately known as Mike Baldwin's Dad in *Coronation Street*; Walter Plunkett, dress designer (*Gone With the Wind*, *Stagecoach*); Karol (Ken) Harris, animator who helped to create Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck and the Road Runner; Everett Riskin, producer for many years with Columbia and MGM (*The Awful Truth*, *Kismet*).

APRIL: Warren Oates, craggy-faced character actor, heavy in many Westerns and hero in cult movies (*The Wild Bunch*, *In the Heat of the Night*); Celia Johnson; W. R. Burnett, novelist and screenwriter (*Little Caesar*, *The Asphalt Jungle*); Tom Tully, character actor of tough but likeable roles (*The Caine Mutiny*, *Charley Varrick*); Arthur Lowe, of *Dad's Army* and *Britannia Hospital*; Archibald Macleish, poet and playwright, credited with starting the motion picture collection of the Library of Congress; Bert Shevelove, playwright and screenwriter (*A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, *The Wrong Box*); C. H. B. Williamson, trade press journalist long known as 'Willie of *The Cinema*'; Huguette Duflos, star of French silent films (*Koenigsmark*); Artur Duarte, pioneer Portuguese director of more than 117 films.

MAY: Hugh Marlowe, former radio announcer, leading man from the 50s (*All About Eve*, *Birdman of Alcatraz*); Romy Schneider; Helmut Dantine, Austrian actor, often cast as Nazi (*Mrs Miniver*, *Operation Crossbow*); Peter Weiss, controversial playwright, author of the *Marat/Sade* and *The Investigation*; Raymond Bussières, veteran player of lugubrious French working men

(*Les Portes de la Nuit*, *Casque d'Or*); Corbet Woodall, television newscaster, lately freelance commentator, interviewer; Elwyn Jones, scriptwriter in television since the 50s, an originator of *Z Cars*; Hugh Beaumont, B-picture leading man and portrayer of private eye Michael Shane (*The Blue Dahlia*, *Pier 23*); Beirne Lay Jr, screenwriter of flying subjects (*Twelve O'Clock High*, *Strategic Air Command*); Robert E. Gottschalk, founder and president of Panavision Inc, pioneer of camera engineering; Jean Wiener, French composer of popular music (*Le Crime de M Lange*, *Mouchette*); Renzo Rossellini, composer brother of Roberto, writer of more than 100 film scores.

JUNE: Rainer Werner Fassbinder; Curt Jürgens; Alan Webb, stage actor who played elderly gentlemen in many films, including *Justice Shallow in Chimes at Midnight*; veteran director Henry King; Anatoli Solonitsyn, actor in Tarkovsky films; Marcelle Pradot, silent screen actress, widow of Marcel L'Herbier; Marjorie Bennett, Australian actress, Chaplin's landlady in *Limelight*.

JULY: Isa Miranda, Italian star of international films (*La Signora di Tutti*, *Summer Madness*); Susan Littler, theatre and television actress, notable as the pool-winning heroine of *Spend, Spend, Spend*; Kenneth More; Alma Reville Hitchcock, Hitchcock's widow and long-time collaborator; Patrick Dewaere, French leading man of the 70s (*Préparez vos Mouchoirs*, *Les Valseuses*); Vic Morrow, actor who usually played criminals or villains (*Portrait of a Mobster*, *Death Watch*); Harold T. Sakata, Hawaiian-born actor and professional wrestler who wielded a deadly bowler as Odd-job in *Goldfinger*; Michael Blankfort, novelist and screenwriter (*Broken Arrow*, co-script *The Caine Mutiny*); Edgar Harrison, film and television actor, lately Dan Archer in the radio serial; Hermann Thimig, member of famous Austrian acting family, in over 60 films (*Little Man What Now*, *The Threepenny Opera*); Willy De Luca, Director-General of RAI; Raymond Borderie, producer (*Les Enfants du Paradis*, *Le Salaire de la Peur*); André Paulve, French distributor/producer (*La Belle et le Bête*).

AUGUST: Henry Fonda; Charles Walters, actor, dancer, choreographer and director of MGM musicals (*Easter Parade*, *High Society*); Cathleen Nesbitt, English actress and beauty, friend of Rupert Brooke, playing character parts into her nineties; Vladimir Zworykin, television pioneer, who worked with RCA in the 20s on development of a TV system; Tom Drake, actor, Judy Garland's 'boy next door' in *Meet Me in St Louis*; Patrick Magee, imposing Irish actor, often in sinister roles (*The Birthday Party*, *Barry Lyn-*

don); Alexander Alexeieff, pointillist of animation, inventor of the pin screen; Alberto Cavalcanti; Ulla Jacobsson, Swedish actress (*One Summer of Happiness*); Ingrid Bergman; Eugene Loring, dancer and choreographer (*Funny Face*, *Silk Stockings*).

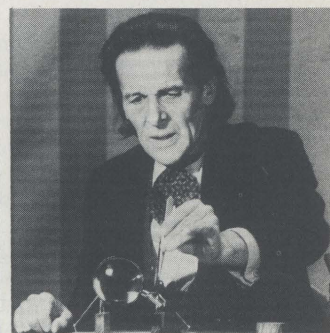
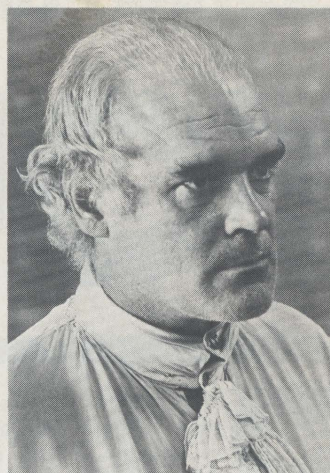
SEPTEMBER: Grace Kelly; Philip Ober, tall actor, often with shaven head (*North by Northwest*, *Elmer Gantry*); Sarah Churchill, Sir Winston's actress daughter; Norman Collins, leading architect of commercial television; Franz Grothe, German composer of film music (*Wir Wunderkinder*, *Das Wirtshaus im Spessart*).

OCTOBER: Jane Buck, continuity girl on many British films, including *Chariots of Fire*; Fernando Lamas, Argentine-born actor/director, played Latin lovers in the 50s (*The Merry Widow*, *The Girl Who Had Everything*); Peter Beggin, television cameraman, five times winner of RTS camera award; Vivien Merchant, subtle, sensuous actress (*Alfie*, *Accident*); Elsie Randolph, musical comedy star of the 30s (*That's a Good Girl*, *This'll Make You Whistle*); François Simon, son of Michel and star of Swiss cinema (*Charles, Mort ou Vif*, *L'Invitation*); Franco Solinas, Italian screenwriter (*Battle of Algiers*, *Mr Klein*); André-Paul Antoine, French dramatist, screenwriter (*Miracle of the Wolves*, Ophuls' *La Tendre Ennemie*); Macdonald Hastings, journalist, television reporter on *Tonight*, presenter of film documentaries; Howard Sackler, film and television writer/director, author of play *The Great White Hope* (*Jaws 2*, *Saint Jack*); Virginia Fox Zanuck, leading lady in silent cinema, widow of Darryl F. Zanuck; Valerio Zurlini, Italian director (*L'Estate Violenta*, *Cronaca Familiare*); John Brahm, German-born director in London and Hollywood (*The Lodger*, *Hangover Square*).

NOVEMBER: King Vidor; Jacques Tati; Elio Petri, Italian director (*Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion*); Chesney Allen, of the Crazy Gang; Arthur Askey (*Charley's Big-Hearted Aunt*, *The Ghost Train*); Yves Ciampi, French director (*Les Héros sont Fatigués*, *Typhon sur Nagasaki*); Marc de Gastyne, director of French silents (*La Merveilleuse Vie de Jeanne d'Arc*); Hilton Edwards, co-founder with Michael MacLiammoir of the Gate Theatre, Dublin and mentor of Orson Welles (*Othello*).

DECEMBER: Verna Fields, Hollywood editor (*Medium Cool*, *Jaws*).

Top to bottom: Patrick Magee (in *The Marat/Sade*), Celia Johnson (*Staying On*), François Simon (*Death of the Director of the Flea Circus*), Vivien Merchant (*Frenzy*), Warren Oates (*Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*).



James Park

FOUR FILMS

4

The thing has been comatose but kicking for so long that it is difficult to have any sense of certainty in identifying signs of a regeneration in British film production. But it is at the very least indicative of a new optimism that a filmmaker who only twelve months ago might have ended his lament on non-existent employment prospects with a statement to the effect that 'the tragedy of Britain is that a Godard, Resnais, Tarkovsky or Coppola could never have made films here,' could argue that in the autumn of 1982 the opportunities did exist for filmmakers working in just such a broad spectrum, as a result of the investment in films by Channel 4.

On its first night of transmission, 2 November 1982, the television channel which had been fought for by independent film-makers for over a decade aired *Walter*, a new film from Stephen Frears. The following night it marked the (temporary) return to these shores of another veteran television director, Michael Apted, by screening *P'tang, Yang, Kipperbang*. It was not unreasonable to ask whether these films marked any fundamentally new direction for British film-making. It had long been part of the rhetoric of Channel 4 that it would give a 'boost' to the British film industry, the like of which it had not seen in decades, but was its ambition only to increase the production of mini-metros, or does it plan some interesting new models?

Channel 4 differs from its counterparts in France and Germany in that it is under no statutory obligation to allow some of the films it partly finances prolonged exposure on cinema screens. The seeming reluctance of the Channel to accept that its films required a 'theatrical life' aggravated some film-makers because it ruled out certain sources of local co-finance including the National Film Finance Corporation (NFFC). The managing director of the NFFC, Mamoun Hassan, charged that unless there was an alteration in the Channel's policy it was doomed to produce only 'quota quickies'. Hassan did not spell out his argument in detail, but its substance seemed to be that it is only prolonged exposure of a film to a concentrated critical gaze and the challenge of the commercial (cinema) marketplace that encourages a filmmaker to experiment with style and form in ways which lead to truly interesting work. Without an allegiance to cinema,

the very best the Channel could hope for would be to make 'Film on Four' as good a slot as the BBC's 'Play for Today'.

The implied criticism of television's output clearly offends those who have worked within television for years to produce high quality drama. Notably Kenith Trodd, who has produced films like Peter Duffell's *Caught on a Train*, Gavin Millar's *Cream in My Coffee* and Charles Sturridge's *Soft Targets*, which would be recognised anywhere on the European continent as quality feature films, and who rose to denounce Hassan's 'misplaced aesthetic fastidiousness'. He pointed out that 'so few films are not going to be watched for a large part of their exposure in small-screen conditions that it is footling to hold out for the superiority of the cinema experience *per se*. In today's world these attitudes are the enemies of cinema, not its last defenders.'

Trodd has worked so long and so hard within both the BBC and independent television that he probably underestimates the narrowness of the aesthetic within which British TV drama works. For Michael Radford, whose *Another Time, Another Place* was one of the first commissions from Channel 4, it would be a betrayal if Channel 4 was only to produce 'the kind of domestic and warm drama that has been the staple food of British television for two decades.' To Karl Francis, director of *Giro City*, the BBC was fine if you wanted to make films which were 'stylish and intellectual', but feature films were about 'scale, emotional and physical scale that touches people's hearts and dreams, leaving them with images and feelings.'

At Channel 4 the existence of the question is recognised. Managing director Jeremy Isaacs argues that making a film for the channel is simply a matter of working in the same medium for a different outlet. He also suggests that better films will emerge from Channel 4 than from any putative feature film industry because there is no requirement upon those working for the 'Film on Four' slot to seek to draw either a national or an international audience. David Rose, the channel's senior commissioning editor (fiction), professes to welcome cinematic qualities in a script but is hard-pressed to give them a definition. 'We might find one day that we are involved in a discussion with an editor or director on something about the pace or cutting which

will help us to put our finger on the difference between a film for television and a film for cinema.'

In the final analysis, the state of cinema-going in Britain requires that the debate be about how to make better and more interesting television. For Gavin Millar, whose *Secrets* formed part of the *First Love* series which was bankrolled by Goldcrest Films and Television, a film is a film. 'You obviously don't stage battle scenes with four armies stretching into the distance,' he says, 'but general framing and composition for the TV screen should be just the same as for the cinema screen.' What he does concede is that the present cathode tube and its crummy sound system is not a satisfactory means of transmission. 'It is just not vivid enough. There is too much to distract the audience. There is nothing like the experience of sitting in the dark with 300 other people.'

Another aspect of the problem is, quite simply, available cash. Channel 4's contribution to the total budget of the first twenty Films on Four was of the order of the average budget for an American feature film (\$9,600,000), about twice what it cost to make *Chariots of Fire* two years ago. With co-finance included, the cost of the individual films made for Channel 4 was around £300-600,000. It is possible to be philosophical about the 'age of the low-budget movie', arguing with David Puttnam that making a large-scale film for today's market (i.e. Hugh Hudson's *Greystoke*, Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*) requires an excessive level of compromise in order to appease the neurosis of financiers and to satisfy the expectations of audiences, but clearly tight and limited budgets do affect the nature of the films that get made.

For the *First Love* series, on which David Puttnam is executive producer, it was decided to make the films in 35mm, as the medium best suited for American television (with its lower line standards) and for theatrical release. To make such films on a budget of around £400,000 required working to a three-week schedule, which one director at least described as 'totally unworkable'. In fact, specials for the US network are often made to much tighter schedules than that. While Gavin Millar was making his 75-minute *Secrets* on location in Ascot, Alan Gibson was at Twickenham Studios making *Witness for the Prosecution* for Norman Rosemont and CBS Network. He had

FOR 4



Top: Phyllis Logan in Michael Radford's 'Another Time, Another Place'. Above: 'Secrets', directed by Gavin Millar.

Top: Hugh Millais in Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen's 'The Bad Sister'. Above: Glenda Jackson in Karl Francis' 'Giro City'.

Right: Phyllis Logan, Claudio Rosini, Giovanni Mauriello in 'Another Time, Another Place'. Far right: 'The Bad Sister': Diane Tammes at camera; Peter Wollen standing, right. Below right: Gavin Millar working in cramped confines on 'Secrets'. Far right: 'Another Time, Another Place': Michael Radford and continuity girl Margaret Waldie.

three weeks with an all-star cast to make a two-hour film. That rate of work is only achieved by using two cameras, which gives a very even cast to the lighting and rules out much of the subtlety which is the hallmark of the best film and television cameramen. It would have been senseless to have worked to that system with cameramen like Phil Mayhew (used for Peter Duffell's *First Love* contribution, *Experience Preferred, But Not Essential*) or Chris Challis (for *Secrets*).

Millar's problems on *Secrets* were not made any easier by the fact that he was shooting on location in the wettest October for years, which played havoc with a precision-calculated schedule. And the cast was largely made up of 13-year-old schoolgirls who could only be allowed to work during weekdays from nine to five as long as they got three hours tuition a day. They could also not get off school before the shoot for days of rehearsal. The associate producer Chris Griffin argued that it was important to keep young actors 'fresh', and that speed was assured by the fact that they were always alert and had mastered their parts much better than could be expected from an adult film actor. But Millar points out that although 5-year-olds may get tired and bored during a rehearsal, 13-year-olds only get better the more rehearsal you give them. 'The more takes they have the more they can relax. But on this schedule we have to stop before we have really squeezed the best performance out of them.' For Millar, therefore, making a Film on Four was something of a mixed blessing. There was nothing aesthetically that would rule the film out for the other networks, but 'if this was shot at the BBC, we would have had a longer schedule, a bit more money and a bit more latitude and elbow room.'

Most of the Films on Four made by directors anxious to secure a theatrical release escaped the worst exigencies of the *First Love* schedules by shooting in Super-16mm, which can be blown up to 35mm with good results. Even so things were not easy. The budget of just under £500,000 for *Giro City* had to cover six weeks shooting in London, Belfast and Wales. 'We raced,' says Francis, 'there was no other way.' On one occasion one of the producers, Sophie Balhetchet, found that the only way she could persuade the crew to wrap up in time to catch the plane was by putting her hand over the camera lens.

Radford describes the problems of making *Another Time, Another Place* as 'horrendous'. They had seven weeks in which to shoot, and they were located permanently in the North of Scotland. But the script, which concerns a farming community in which three Italian prisoners of war are located during World War Two, was very dependent on showing the passage of time through the

agricultural year. Shooting four periods of two weeks each was ruled out by the simple cost of insuring the actors and main crew throughout the period, especially Italians who would be flying to and fro. The decision was made to shoot from early September, in the somewhat forlorn hope that the transition between late summer and late autumn would offer the full range of weather conditions from sun to snow. Some crucial landscapes without actors had been shot as pickups earlier in the year.

'It was really,' says Radford, 'a large budget film, or a very low budget film which we should have made over a period of years with a few friends.' There were, however, compensations. The cameraman, Roger Deakins, is experienced in *vérité* documentary and consequently accustomed to moving fast with a hand-held camera to capture gestures and movements. Radford has also made documentaries for the BBC, from which he has learnt to think on his feet. 'For me, feature film-making is a matter of going out on the set and being able to improvise while still retaining a distinctive style. By the end that is what we were doing. I was able to hand out bits of rewritten script from the floor, and as I got more in tune with Roger we were able to judge the pace to the point where we could shoot scenes in one shot.'



Channel 4 may claim that its films are only as good as the directors who have come forward with their wares. But more than thirty of the 3,000 scripts submitted to David Rose are likely to have had some potential, and the decision in late summer 1982 to defer some projects which had provisionally been given a go-ahead reflected the problems in deciding between 'good' projects.

It has been suggested that the clue to the 'survival' of a project into the production phase lies in its ability to attract foreign interest. Only a few projects have been 100 per cent financed by the Channel (*Hero*, *Remembrance*, *The Disappearance of Harry* and *Bad Hats*) and these were made in the first months of the Channel's operation, when it was keen to make a few films quickly to work out issues relating to contracts and union agreements. Later projects have had to attract co-finance, which needs to recoup from foreign markets because of the attitude taken by the Channel to UK theatrical exhibition (which in any case offers dodgy prospects of recoupment). Derek Jarman's *Caravaggio* did not happen because the co-financiers demanded a long theatrical window; *Giro City*, with an international star in Glenda Jackson, and *Another Time, Another Place*, with strong prospects in the Italian cinema market (healthy), did.

David Rose points out that producing

internationalised films was exactly what the Channel was seeking to avoid. 'We want to have an influence over the kind of films we are making and to keep a degree of editorial control. If the stars associated with a script attract a considerable amount of international co-finance, then there is a danger that the script will be inflated beyond what I believe to be a film for television. It begins to have ingredients that are put there to attract the cinema audience. Some very small scale, in the best sense of the word, films can be inflated in this way.'



Certainly, it would be wrong to consider *Giro City* as in any way compromised by international ambitions. It is in fact a bold attempt at something new in British film-making, a political thriller which examines municipal corruption in South Wales and media attitudes to terrorism in Northern Ireland. It is also Karl Francis' riposte to film executives who argue that it is commercial suicide to make films on contemporary British themes. 'They have frankly been proved wrong time and time again,' he says. 'If they had made *Chariots of Fire* in 1924 it would have been a much more interesting film. When a film is about contemporary issues, you don't even have to expect to like it in order to go to see it.'

Francis did in fact submit *Giro City* to the BBC, but he claims that a meeting of programme controllers (from Wales, Ireland and England) decided to give it the thumbs down as a consequence of its treatment of sensitive questions about the operation of censorship in the media. The film relates the struggles of a documentary film-maker and a reporter to overcome the obstacles put up by the television and political establishments in order to make two filmed reports; one about an IRA leader on the run, the other on the efforts of a local councillor, sufficiently bribed by a multi-national corporation, to evict a family from their farm in South Wales. The rejection of the script by the BBC is seen by Francis as confirming his assertion that the media are an 'evil force in society', seeking to narrow the pursuit of truth by bringing everything down to a very centralised position. 'The media operate on so many levels,' says Francis, 'why should they give us such a narrow view of the world?'

Francis points out that, in Britain as opposed to America, you can say things in documentary which would be totally unacceptable in a drama. But to complete the ironical circle, the script of *Giro City* was largely based on his experiences as a documentary film-maker. He dealt with Welsh issues in his BFI-funded documentary *Above Us the Earth*, and in *Rough Justice*, which he made for the BBC in 1981. Making *Chekhov in Derry* about



Brian Friel's theatre company (for Channel 4), gave him an opportunity to study the working of the Northern Ireland security system and glean information which he was able to put to use in *Giro City*. His only previous feature film was *The Mouse and the Woman*, which was unfortunate (or incompetent) enough to open in the week of the Royal Wedding. Even the critics were sufficiently part of the national exultation either to damn it or to ignore it.

Francis feels that for the time being he has reached the end of the road as a documentarist, but that documentaries were his most important education in the way people speak, think and act. What is now important for him is to develop his own style as a film-maker, something which he associates with being able to work within a specific genre in pursuit of a core emotional issue. *Giro City* is a very diffuse work, in that it takes in the operation of television, the Irish situation, the Welsh situation, multi-national corporations, sexism and much else. There was not much room in the script for the development of character. Directors whom Francis admires for their ability to combine an individual style with a deep understanding of people include Maurice Pialat, Francesco Rosi, Raoul Walsh, Bill Douglas and John Cassavetes.

Francis is not optimistic, however, that even the presence of Channel 4 will enable him to make the kind of films that interest him. Certainly it is unlikely to be sufficient in itself to enable him to make two or three movies a year, as he would like. In America, as he sees it, both audiences and executives love films. British moguls such as Lew Grade and Barry Spikings committed the ultimate sin of

ignoring British film-makers in their ambition to make films for the US audience, but in fact showed a contempt for that audience. 'The Americans,' he says, 'are actually much more intelligent about what they want to see than Spikings or Grade gave them credit for. They like good movies.' He feels that his best hope may be to make a film that exists within the American context. 'The trouble is I don't want to go to Hollywood and sit on my behind for three years and end up with no films.'



Michael Radford, who like Francis writes his own scripts, shares with Francis the notion that it is to the strength of the documentary tradition that British film-makers must turn. He instances Michael Grigsby's film on the Inuit for Granada and Chris Menges' *East 109th Street* as the most interesting experiments in the use of television in recent years. 'I don't mean,' he says, 'that the films we make should look like documentaries, but that the level of debate about documentary and the level of sheer film-making technique is so much higher than in feature films.'

Since Radford left the National Film School, most of his work has been for the BBC. His drama *The White Bird Passes* is misleadingly referred to as semi-documentary because it was based on the experience of a real person. The story of Jessie Kesson, the daughter of a prostitute in Elgin, is picked up in *Another Time, Another Place*, which treats her marriage to a Scottish farmer. Jessie Kesson is credited on the script as co-writer, having written a story which Radford then transformed into a screenplay.

'It is based,' says Radford, 'on her life, so it is something that I could not really have invented myself.' The film was at one point going to be made for the BBC, but Radford was determined not to make another film by union agreements which precluded a theatrical release. 'The thing that really hurt me is that I spent a year of my life making *The White Bird Passes*. It went out one night on television on BBC2, won a couple of prizes and then was never seen or heard of again. And it is not as if I am making a film every three or six months.'

Radford's hope is that Channel 4 will become more courageous in the projects which it backs and make it possible for British film-makers to produce work which is as formally interesting as it is intriguing in terms of subject matter. He locates the great obstacle as lying on the Hampstead, BBC2, *Sunday Times* colour supplement axis: 'We are very good at producing a middlebrow analysis of things, not at all good at producing something of really high aesthetic quality or particularly popular or gripping. It is all very good for sitting around on a Sunday afternoon.'



It is probably to the credit of Channel 4 that it has shown willing to back directors from very different backgrounds. In some cases David Rose has had very little to support his hunch that someone could make a good film for television. Neil Jordan, the director of *Angel*, was a novelist who had worked for John Boorman on *Excalibur*. The risk was amply justified in the wit and cinematic competence of the result. For National Theatre associate director Bill Bryden,

Ill Fares the Land was also his film-making debut.

Other directors have been old hands: Jack Gold, Michael Apted, Stephen Frears, Peter Duffell and Michael Darlow, for whom it is probably accurate to see Channel 4 as merely a new source of cash for 'good' television drama. During the production of *Secrets* Gavin Millar was still involved in the dubbing of *Intensive Care*, an Alan Bennett play made for the BBC. In the spring he is making a film for BBC producer Alan Shalcross based on Rosamond Lehmann's *The Weather in the Streets* and *Invitation to the Waltz*. What mainly distinguishes *Secrets* for Millar is the relationship he has established with the writer, National Film School student Noella Smith. Millar chose the script from several he was offered by executive producer David Puttnam, being interested in its exploration of themes of 'clannishness, fear imposed by authority for trivial breaches of regulations, and the whole idea of an enclosed society which sets up its own foolish rules and then raps itself over the knuckles for breaking them...'

In television the relationship is generally strongest between a writer and producer, and the director is seen as the employee who realises the writer's work. The gap necessarily constricts the freedom of the director. Millar records that on *Cream in My Coffee* he was instructed that he couldn't change a comma, but the writer was not available for consultation. For *Intensive Care* Alan Bennett was present throughout by happenstance, since he was playing the lead role.

For *Secrets*, as for the other *First Love* films, *P'tang, Yang, Kipperbang* and *Experience Preferred, But Not Essential*, the writer was present throughout pre-production, production and editing. Millar seems to have enjoyed the extensive co-operation. 'We changed the structure quite a lot. We developed some characters and extended scenes which were hints and seemed promising. We also made one or two confrontations possible which were not written up in the original. During production Noella has responded to the way a scene has developed and also to elements such as the furniture and weather.'



By the very nature of the special effects technologies which it uses, *The Bad Sister* is bound to contribute something new to the vocabulary of British film-making. But since it is being made on video, it is also likely to remain a television item. The film is the first 'commercial' project from Peter Wollen and Laura Mulvey, who have previously made experimental work with backing from the BFI Production Board, the Arts Council and Southern Arts. The script was written with finance from the National Film Development Fund, and is based on the book by Emma Tennant. The film tells of an investigation by a television journalist into a pair of murders; the illegitimate daughter of one of the victims, a Scottish aristocrat, is



'P'tang, Yang, Kipperbang'.

implicated in the killings, together with her female 'gang'. The project appealed to Mulvey because of her interest in feminist psychoanalysis, and the scope which the book gave to explore the 'relationship between a woman's image and her body.'

It is those elements that the video special effects are designed to explore. Colours will be adjusted to emphasise certain participants in the story (i.e. bright colours for Meg, the gang leader). Objects will move. The central character will see an image of herself in mirror colours. Colours will be largely desaturated in order to highlight specific objects. (The Moving Picture Company, which is doing the effects for *The Bad Sister*, also did the *Financial Times* TV advertisement involving a pink newspaper in a black and white setting.) It will take about six weeks to put the special effects in the final edit.

Peter Wollen co-wrote the script for Michelangelo Antonioni's *The Passenger*, and the idea that *The Bad Sister* could be made on video and then transferred to film for cinema distribution was inspired by reports of Antonioni's use of colour painting devices for *The Oberwald Mystery*. Unfortunately, the blow-up to 35mm on *Oberwald* looked awful, and the film was generally labelled a mere 'oddy'. The problem with video does not lie in the look of the image. Wollen and Mulvey have engaged as cameraman for *The Bad Sister* Diane Tammes, who has done all their previous films, and she is happy with the lighting effects possible from a lightweight Sony camera and a full range of filters. But according to special effects director Mitch Mitchell, there is simply not enough definition in a 625-line picture to give results on 35mm. It is a problem that will only be overcome when the prototype 1125 system being developed by Sony becomes widely available. Wollen continues to hope that the technology is moving ahead 'at a speed which would mean that the picture would be ready for transfer at a time when the capacity to get a good transfer does exist.'

The Bad Sister is only one of several dramas that The Moving Picture Company under executive producer Nigel Stafford-Clark are making for Channel 4, but their particular interest in this project obviously lies in the opportunity it presents to show what video can do for film-makers. But a true budget for *The Bad Sister* would show that the special

effects can only be afforded on the Channel 4 level of budget because much of the expense has been absorbed into the running costs of the company as a whole. It is much cheaper to get an equivalent effect on video than on film, but special effects never come cheap.

For a directing team, video is perhaps the most appropriate medium. Of the pair, Wollen was the director who spent most of his time on the floor with the actors, while Mulvey was peering through the camera. For *The Bad Sister*, he remains on the floor while she sits behind the monitor and conveys her advice and instructions through a microphone link.

Mulvey and Wollen see *The Bad Sister* as part of a coming to the screen of a current of British culture which developed in the 1970s and had no access to television. Wollen was associated with Emma Tennant in her 'school of writing' as a contributor to the literary magazine *Bananas*. It was only one part of the great effort which made Channel 4 possible, 'that kind of independent work that people did on very little money, but a lot of energy and initiative.' Laura Mulvey says, 'I would include in that our early experimental films, which are not something that we have lost or left behind, but are something that we have now been able to grow out of.'



The success which several of the films backed by Channel 4 have already enjoyed at international festivals can only confirm the suspicion that something new is afoot in British film-making, for which Channel 4 must take a large part of the credit. And if to the more aesthetically ambitious film-makers the attitude of the Channel looked a little crabbed and cautious, that is hardly surprising. At the moment, it knows only that it is spending 10 per cent of its total budget on a hundredth of the number of hours it requires. It knows that the projects are made within tight budgets and could for that reason come through in a mediocre form. But to justify the expense, the Films on Four have to be sold to the public as their Rolls-Royce productions. It is only when films like *Angel*, *The Draughtsman's Contract* and *Moonlighting* win some small success in international markets, and there is every reason to hope that they will, that the Channel can be expected to combine caution with true courage.

It is also clear that Channel 4 alone cannot be a panacea. But it may be that the injection of a £6,000,000 capital fund into the British film industry, combined with the awareness of Channel 4 as an outlet for product and the hazy prospect of a proliferation of channels greedy for feature films, has been enough to encourage a real flow of cash for production. Hence Goldcrest, Handmade Films, United Media Finance and Rediffusion Films and a whole bouquet of smaller flowers. For the film-makers who struggled to maturity through the 70s, whether in film schools, the commercials industry or television, it is the opportunity to be prolific that they most require. ■

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Richard Combs, Gilbert Adair and Nick Roddick write about some of the films that were shown in the 26th London Film Festival

LEFT

RICHARD COMBS

Film festivals usually come with their own built-in hype, which depends on the illogical notion that one can discern what is best in cinema through a glittering array of what is new. London has traditionally avoided the more depressing aspects of this kind of hoop-la, both by not giving prizes and by selecting a large part of its programme from what has been shown at other festivals in the preceding year. But if it has not always swelled with self-importance, the London Film Festival has grown dismayingly in size. It has submerged any sense that the best of cinema is here in the rationale that all of cinema is here. Or rather, the two coexist, so that it is often hard to determine when a film is being presented because it is of world-class distinction or simply because it represents something which somebody somewhere might want to see.

But the 26th festival came on strong with a hype of its own, about the rebirth of the British cinema. No less than four opening galas were held, 'spotlighting four separate strands of independent production', and baptising the 'New British Cinema' as confidently as its German and Australian cousins of recent years. There is a distasteful opportunism about this proclamation—not confined to the festival, there has also been a glut of flag-waving ballyhoo in the press of late—based simply on the fact that more films than usual were made in Britain in

the past year. Given the diversity of aims, methods and achievements in those gala films, the all-embracing rubric seems anomalous; and given that two of the four, *The Draughtsman's Contract* and *Hero*, were made with the backing of Channel 4, whose impact on the kind of films being made in this country is as yet debatable, it is also dangerously premature. (Of the other two, *The Captain's Doll*, a D. H. Lawrence adaptation, was made in a conventional way for the BBC.) Three of the four will have been publicly shown by the time this article appears, and their extra-festival reception may well have tempered the current chorus of chauvinistic drum beating—when the *Standard* can trumpet the 'renaissance everyone's on about' and *The Times* suggest that it is 'unpatriotic' to find fault with *The Draughtsman's Contract*.

This kind of rhetoric aside, there are very good reasons why an independent British film like Barney Platts-Mills' *Hero*—which explicitly takes issue with its Britishness by relating the Gaelic legend of Finn MacCool in Gaelic—should be shown in the festival, even if the result seems a sadly bungled opportunity. But it is hard to justify festival space for *The Praying Mantis*, a kind of benumbed Chabrolian murder romp, set in Normandy but made without much feeling for place, character or cinema by Jack Gold (usually, and always better, employed on TV), and screened, five days later and one hour longer, on Channel 4. In theory, Peter Bogdanovich's *They All Laughed*, at the moment without a British distributor, should be fair festival game; in the event, it was the kind of embarrassment that no selection committee should have to answer for. Only Audrey Hepburn emerges with any dignity, simply because she seems so lost and out of key with the slick, smirking mood of this 'comedy' of private eyes and

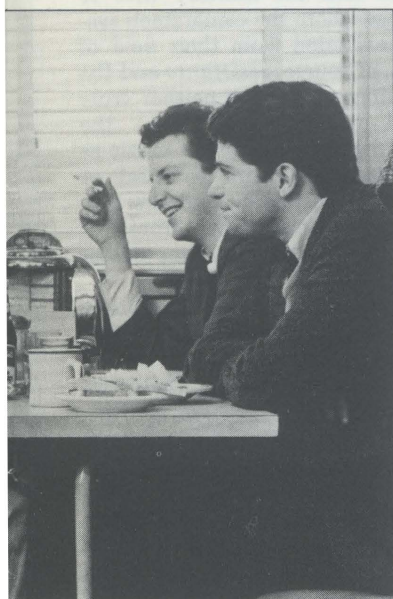
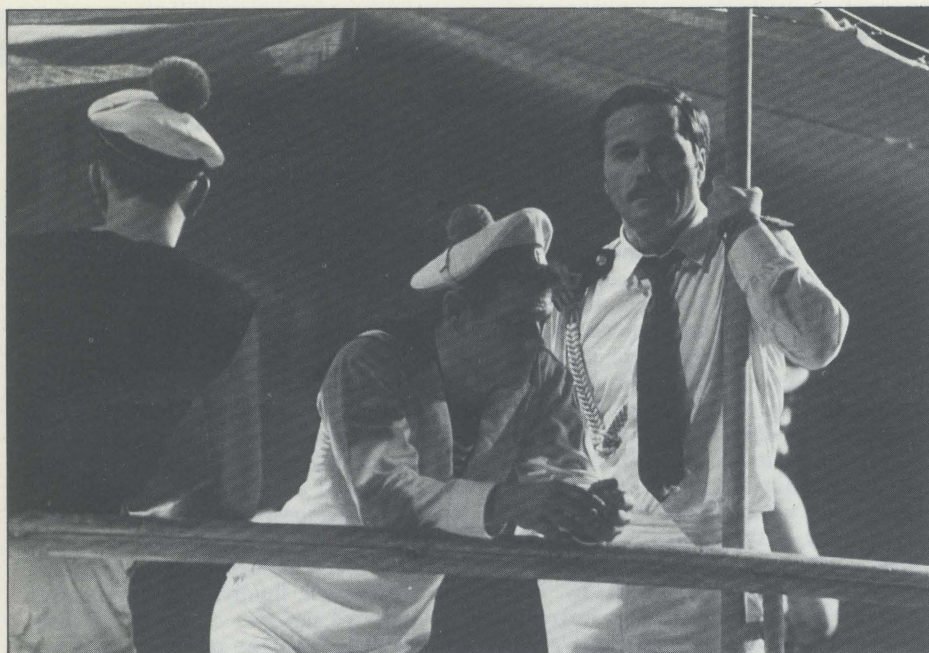


Top: *'Les Fantômes du Chapelier'* and

their clients criss-crossing paths all over New York.

That good films can be made from people hopping in and out of taxicabs was proven by *Chan Is Missing*, which made the point—missed by Bogdanovich despite all his Rivette-like toiling—that what people are chasing after is not necessarily what they are looking for. In this instance, the chase has some classic private eye/film noir ingredients: an exotic but soon shabbily familiar demimonde (San Francisco's Chinatown), a missing person (the eponymous Chan, who has disappeared with \$4,000 which he and his partners, Jo and Steve, were going to invest in their own cab company), and the gradual widening of the specific investigation to encompass other lives and other sadnesses. But it is no surprise to discover that *Chan Is Missing* never delivers any of the classic answers, that Chan is never found, and the reason for his disappearance never established. Before it has proceeded very far with the mystery, in fact, the film substitutes a riddle: what is a Chinese American?

In tackling this question, Wayne Wang,



'Querelle'; above: 'Diner' and 'La Guerre d'un Seul Homme'.

here making his second independent feature on minimal, 16mm, black and white resources, sets off other riddles to reflect the complexities of the Chinese mind. We are teased in turn with Confucius-like parables, Chinese cookie wisdom and earnest anthropology. All of which relates to a dilemma—are they Nationalist, Communist or American Chinese?—that bedevils both Chan and his pursuers.

Chan Is Missing answers nothing, but in a way satisfies one's curiosity. The reverse, unfortunately, might be said of Joseph Losey's *La Truite* (*The Trout*), which seems to be constantly toying with its characters and situations in its efforts to leave no stone of irony unturned, but never establishes at the most basic level why or in what way we are supposed to be interested in them. An adaptation of a novel by Roger Vailland, this is an old project which seems to have gone dead or brittle in the years of turning it over in the mind, and despite the attempt to update the source by switching a business trip-cum-dirty-weekend from Hollywood to Japan, it has found no purchase in the present. The only connections one can

find for these shadowy characters are with the ghosts of Losey past: Jean-Pierre Cassel and Jeanne Moreau as a couple torturing each other unto death echo *Eva*, and Isabelle Huppert as the trout farmer's daughter is as destructive an innocent as Mia Farrow in *Secret Ceremony*. The decor glitters, and there's some very fishy symbolism, but this is not even full-fledged Losey baroque, more an overtaxed rococo doodle.

Fassbinder's is a sensibility one might think far from Losey, but sex, class and control form an interlinked obsession for them both, with homosexual undertones more unashamedly 'over' in Fassbinder, and a campy element in which the German director delights but Losey only lets out on occasions (*Modesty Blaise*). *Veronika Voss*, at any rate, is as confident an essay in the politics of sex (and vice versa) as Fassbinder ever produced. Where Losey hedges his bets by offering us a plot that is neither a complete narrative nor an overt metaphor, Fassbinder goes straight for the jugular with an absurdly paradigmatic situation. *Veronika Voss* (Rosel Zech), an ex-UFA

film star, is, in the mid-50s, a pathetic has-been, living on dreams of a comeback while her body and soul are in hock to the morphine-dispensing 'neurologist' Dr Marianne Katz (Annemarie Düringer), a villainness of Langian dimension.

The melodrama of *Veronika Voss* allies it with some of Fassbinder's earlier exercises in the domestic power game, particularly *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*, while its digging into postwar ethics continues a line of thought from *The Marriage of Maria Braun* and *Lola*. (Paradigm has even gone beyond self-parody when Fassbinder again has his one-man emblem of the American occupation, a black sergeant, calmly camping out in Dr Katz's white-on-white premises, while 'Country Hour' on the radio provides a constant accompaniment of the likes of 'Sixteen Tons' and 'The Battle of New Orleans'.) That *Veronika Voss* is better than the above three films, and arguably Fassbinder's best, also owes something to style rather than any basic alteration in his themes. The film's resonance and expansiveness might be suggested by tracing a history of Fassbinder sources: if *Petra von Kant* draws emotionally on Sirk, and *The Marriage of Maria Braun* is a saga of national consciousness akin to George Stevens, *Veronika Voss* trumps them with a black little fable of greed, ambition and movie-made nightmares after the Billy Wilder of *Sunset Boulevard*.

Jacques Demy's *Une Chambre en Ville* (*A Room in Town*) is also something of a triumph of style, although it is more indeterminate in effect. Like the Losey film, this is a project which Demy has nursed for many years: since, apparently, leaving film school and wanting to do something in novel, film or opera form about his home town of Nantes and its labour troubles on the waterfront. As it happens, he has now combined two of these possibilities, since *A Room in Town* is an operatic musical in which all the dialogue is sung, and in which a limited number of sets (two main interiors) and one major location (the Place de la Préfecture, for the clash of police and shipyard strikers, which is used almost like a set) leave one to imagine a curtain ringing down between the acts.

Demy choreographs the movements of his characters in and around these places with a beautiful precision, makes a stirring ballet out of the background of industrial unrest, and piques one's colour sense in a way that stops just short of being cute. But the emotions remain strictly choreographed as well, while the operatic structure allows too much centre stage to be hogged by the most tedious character, Danielle Darrieux's garrulous bourgeois *grande dame*. Only Michel Piccoli, as an obsessively jealous, miserly and homicidal TV salesman—not the most likely character to find in Demy—brings to this supposed tale of *amour fou* any hint of the really *fou*. For the rest, Demy might still be trying to live up to, or live down, the perfect emotional harmonies of *Lola*.

GILBERT ADAIR

There are films (notably Chabrol's) that are watched, so to speak, 'through a keyhole'; with his latest, however, it's almost as if one were furtively spying on the protagonists from behind a grubby lace curtain. Based on a Simenon novel, *Les Fantômes du Chapelier* is set in La Rochelle at an indeterminate period sometime between the 30s and the 50s (were it not for a poster teasingly advertising Wyler's *Ben-Hur*, one would opt without hesitation for the 30s). The city is being terrorised by a mysterious stranger of middle-aged women. The stranger, it transpires, is Labbé (Michel Serrault), a prosperous hatter, compulsively fussbudgety in his habits, and another of his singularities is to have removed one of the display dummies from his shop to his flat upstairs, where it deputises for his recently deceased, indeed strangled, wife. Each afternoon Labbé takes his constitutional, usually dropping in at a café for a ritual game of bridge with his cronies (that, plus the cramped, cobblestoned, vaguely medieval perspectives of La Rochelle, brought *Tristana* more than once to mind); but instead of walking a poodle, say, he 'walks' his over-the-way neighbour, Kachoudas (Charles Aznavour), a melancholic Armenian tailor, Jewish in all but his faith (he is apparently a Catholic), who trots obediently and anxiously at his heels. Drawn to Labbé by the morbid fascination of the victim for the executioner, fascinated yet repelled by the nonchalant finesse of Labbé's methods in comparison with the genocidal massacres by which, one imagines, his own past must be haunted, poor Kachoudas accompanies the killer on his forays as protectively as a mother seeing her child off to school—as if, somehow, his craving, an exile's craving, for a quiet life could best be assured by Labbé escaping detection.

What, then, might have been no more than one of those bilious and somewhat programmatic exposés of provincial moeurs, practised in the 40s by Duvivier and Clouzot, develops into an often extremely funny portrayal of *folie à deux*. And Serrault's performance, all tics and tantrums, is an extraordinary *tour de force*, not unworthy of Barrault's Opale in *Le Testament du Docteur Cordélier* or even of Chaplin's Verdoux.

Ed Graczyk's play *Come Back to the Five & Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean* was originally staged by Robert Altman off-Broadway in October 1981, and featured the same principals as are now to be seen in his movie adaptation. It all takes place within the gaudy confines of a small Woolworths store in Texas, where

five former members of a James Dean fan club are holding a reunion. Reunions are as booby-trapped in the theatre as they are in life, and Graczyk, in his attempt to dramatise the blighted hopes and discarded illusions, the self-deceptions and self-recriminations, that are statutory for most such occasions, has defeated his purpose by encumbering his no-hopers with such an impressive array of traumas. For starters, there is the fact that, though all the reunioners are women, not all of them had been girls twenty years before. And if Karen Black playing a transsexual (who also seems to have acquired a squint on the operating table) weren't enough excitement for any two-act play, it turns out that Cher, as a roller derby queen with the kind of Alpine bust fantasised about by both sexes, has in the meantime undergone a mastectomy. As for Sandy Dennis—well, the day a Sandy Dennis character is not nurturing some warm, secret hurt, the earth will cave in.

Yet, in spite of the second-act revelations going clickety-click in one's ear with digital regularity, and in spite of the inhibitive set (a masterpiece of nostalgic Pop Art in itself), Altman's restless camera so exhilaratingly *ventilates* the limited space at its disposal that it is only when someone steps outside the store, vanishing into an all too obvious backstage limbo, that one is overtaken by a claustrophobic sense of characters in stazy quarantine. Altman being, as we know, the most accomplished director of actresses in the American cinema since Cukor, the cast is superb—Cher in particular, funny and moving at the same time as she gazes at the reflection of her non-existent breasts in the steamy Woolworths mirror.

Thank heaven, Godard's venerable and fatuous *mot* about the cinema being truth 24 times a second appears to have fallen out of critical favour. If I was reminded of it by *La Guerre d'un seul homme*, it is because Edgardo Cozarinsky's film actually stands it on its head, extending the principle of the 'lying flashback' (as conceived by Hitchcock in *Stage Fright*) to its entire running time. The 'one man' referred to in the title is the German novelist and essayist Ernst Jünger, best-known for his anti-totalitarian allegory *On the Marble Cliffs*. And, on the Continent at least, for his diaries, passages from the wartime instalments of which (Jünger, an officer in the Wehrmacht, was stationed in occupied Paris, before being sent to the Russian front) are here juxtaposed with French newsreel footage from the same period. But *juxtaposed* is perhaps a misleading word. Cozarinsky never sets Jünger up as a repository of any objective 'truth' about the war to counterpoint the obscene logorrheal ooze of the documentary material, with its mutton-headed Parisian *élégantes* modelling hats run up out of newspapers, its thrilling Longchamp races (where the commentator carefully dispels the ambiguity surrounding one of the winners, Isaac, by reassuring the specta-

tor that it is the horse's name, not the jockey's) and its chic collaborationists—Lifar, Guitry, Maurice Chevalier—caught by the camera in *flagrante delicto* with the occupier.

For all his intelligence and lucidity, Jünger's discourse is a decidedly equivocal one; and a remark of his, not quoted in the film, something to the effect of Cocteau being in Hell but making himself cosy there, would apply (as is so often the case with such neat formulae) equally well to his own situation. Throughout, in fact, he may be detected queasily savouring the spectacle, not of the war exactly, but of himself savouring the spectacle of the war. His insights are, in their own fashion, as inadequate as the bombast of the newsreel commentators. And what one is left with, finally, is an impression of Jünger as not less of a 'victim' than anyone else, than the profiteers and the collaborators and the military (not to mention those whom the cameramen systematically excluded from their field of vision: Jews, of course, *résistants* and the mass of ordinary folk who neither truly collaborated nor resisted). Even the crude Nazi-inspired labelling of music as 'Aryan' (Pfitzner, Richard Strauss) or 'degenerate' (Schoenberg, Schreker), a labelling that Cozarinsky ironically endorses in his film, has become meaningless. It is all equal now.

So to *Querelle*, without doubt the most avidly awaited film in the festival and the one most calculated to divide an audience. Love it or loathe it, there can be no half-measures. I loathed it. But, aside from the eerie and poignant novelty of watching what is unarguably the very last Fassbinder film, secure in the knowledge that there aren't a couple of subsequent titles already in the can, I found myself, even as I collapsed in giggles, as fascinated with it as Kachoudas with Labbé's nocturnal excursions. Easy enough to locate the source of those giggles: a torchy ballad sung by Jeanne Moreau that would be a strong contender for the first gay Eurovision Song Contest; a pompous voice-off narration reciting Genet's obscenities in a tone more suited to a James A. Fitzpatrick travelogue; the sight of the actors struggling to get their mouths around some literally *unspeakable* dialogue (the barbed gossamer of Genet's *écriture*, so eloquent on the printed page, simply defies insertion into any natural speech patterns, certainly English speech patterns); and a crowd of dizzy incidentals, such as a homosexual police inspector who gets his off-duty kicks by dressing up as ... a cop! The film's devotees will counter by citing the luxuriant bleakness of its vision and its intense visual stylisation. But 'bleakness of vision' is not a value *per se*; and the overpowering theatricality of its single set, bathed in a sickly orange glow as if the whole movie were on heat, only reinforces my conviction that the most indispensable shot in the similarly studio-bound *Saga of Anatahan* was its sole exterior one, of the open sea, a shot that Sternberg ever after regretted.

that Sternberg ever after regretted.

However, the question nagging at me during *Querelle* was why, given that his best work has always been informed with a camp sensibility, Fassbinder resorted, when tackling the theme head on, to the most debased of homosexual iconographies, one straight out of those gay equivalents of girlie magazines, and whose recurrent motif is, to put it both bluntly and delicately, the *bulge*. Why did his dream (if such it is) have to surface as a strictly private fantasy—Brad Davis' glittering torso cherry-topped by a *matelot's* red pom-pom? Why, indeed, are homosexual directors chronically incapable of communicating their sexuality on film?

NICK RODDICK

The 1982 LFF has been the end of the line for that old 60s equation, formal experiment=radical film. This time the high spots have nearly all been films which had something to say and which said it simply: the only real exceptions were *The Draughtsman's Contract* and *Querelle*. Peter Greenaway's film was reviewed in the last issue of SIGHT AND SOUND and *Querelle* is taken to task elsewhere in this report by Gilbert Adair. As a less than avid admirer of Fassbinder but a long-time devotee of Genet, I found it a massive, spellbinding achievement.

But there can be little doubt that the LFF's most consistently entertaining film was Barry Levinson's *Diner*, which opened commercially the day after its NFT screening (something of a feature of the 1982 festival). Levinson, who started in television and co-scripted *Silent Movie* and *High Anxiety*, has perfected the comedy of escalating confusion: an exchange in *Diner* about who is going to eat a roast beef sandwich is both unsummarisable and unforgettable. The film, set in Baltimore during the final week of the 50s, is his feature debut. Beneath it all, it is a slightly old-fashioned, Renoir-esque comedy in which the egocentric sexism of its five male heroes is neither endorsed nor explicitly questioned, merely presented as a fact of 50s life, as much a part of the world as rock and roll. The comments on the end of the Eisenhower era are all the more effective for being oblique, and the main characters are given ample room to develop via their earnest attempts to resolve the Technicolor traumas of adolescence, against a background of wonderfully idiosyncratic details, of which the most memorable is the massive Earl ('He's not human, you know: more like a building with feet') who eats his way through the entire left side of the diner's menu (including the

chicken dinner), before driving home in his minute Nash Metropolitan. It would be wrong to call *Diner* a gem: that implies a small-scale discovery. It is a full-scale jewel, proving once again that, when it's really rolling, Hollywood is difficult to beat.

If *Diner's* sense of history is a secondary attribute, history is the key to one of the festival's best films. Shyam Benegal's *Ascending Scale* is a history of modern India, from the Naxalite riots, through Mrs Gandhi's Defence of India Rules, to the modest reforms of the present day. It is told through the life (though not the eyes) of a sharecropper who overcomes his sense of indebtedness—both financial and personal—to his landlord, and registers his right to his land under a new government scheme. This leads to a protracted legal wrangle, won under one government, lost under the next. He is beaten up, crippled and evicted; finally, he becomes the village's political representative. The striking thing about *Ascending Scale* is that at no time does it give in to the temptations to present its story as a tragedy of oppression. The film's determination to relate personal change to its material and economic roots—'the land,' says the central character, 'is like a mother'—makes it a classic (Marxist) history of modern India. Hari Mondal, the sharecropper, is neither emblematic nor individualised: he is a person whose history is that of his country, and whose country is, Benegal suggests, poised on the brink of massive change.

Antonioni's *Identification of a Woman* is a brilliant, glittering piece of filmmaking that dies of anaemia about three-quarters of the way through. The lost people who wander through all Antonioni films wander through *Identification of a Woman*, this time to an 80s techno-rock score and with 80s articulate cynicism. The surface is near flawless, with its interlocking motifs—cigarette lighters, stairwells, electronics, science fiction—and its magnificent set-pieces, most notably a long sequence in the fog. But beneath it all, there is only the hero's inability to find the kind of woman he wants and his problems in finding the kind of film he wants/needs to make 'in this ruin, this corruption'. To be fair to Antonioni, that is his point: such things are still central to individual (male) existence, but unfashionable subjects for a movie. 'I'm no kind of intellectual,' declares Niccolo (Tomas Milian), whom one is bound to see as an Antonioni surrogate. 'Well, it's the popular belief,' replies Ida (Christine Boisson), the woman who will soon let him down by turning out to be pregnant by someone else. I prefer an epitaph from *Diner*: 'Do you ever have the feeling there's something going on that you don't know about?' The something-going-on here is at best obscure, at worst trivial.

Identification of a Woman is, of course, a stunningly beautiful film: what it almost completely lacks is energy. And that has been the element common to the

handful of films which have really registered at the 1982 festival: *Diner*, *Ascending Scale*, Saura's *Tender Hours*... And Mike de Leon's *Kisapmata*, a controlled melodrama about a retired Manila policeman who is forced to let his daughter marry when she becomes pregnant, but then effectively prevents her leaving his house. Punctuated by date-and-time titles and a growling, film noir score, *Kisapmata* approaches its bloody and much signalled denouement with inexorable logic. The policeman is never likeable but his obsession becomes progressively understandable, as does his daughter's inability to leave. De Leon's camera prowls up and down stairs, observes its threatened innocents from low angles, and rack focuses on the father sinisterly watching his helpless child. Overheated but sensitive, *Kisapmata* is film melodrama in the best sense—a treatment of basic conflicts and libidinal obsessions within a framework whose conventional outlines enable wider implications to be hinted at.

Energetic in a different way are two fine but contrasting documentaries, Joan Harvey's *America—From Hitler to MX* (with 'MX' substituted at the last minute for 'Reagan') and Maxim Ford's *Live a Life*. The American film assembles an extraordinary range of witnesses to the fact that American nuclear policy is first and foremost aggressive—Cruise and MX are 'first-strike weapons', not defensive ones—and that postwar testing and the existing nuclear industry are polluting vast tracts of the country and slowly killing off the first generation of nuclear workers. Scrupulously researched and cogently edited in the best American (mainstream) tradition—viz CBS's *60 Minutes—America—From Hitler to MX* is a classic documentary. So, too—though in a very different tradition—is *Live a Life*, a filmed record of the TUC's Concert for the Young Unemployed at London's Rainbow Theatre (with The Beat, Tom Robinson, Black Slate and others), combined with interviews. Its strength lies in the fact that it goes beyond the easy outrage produced by its early montages of headlines, statistics and governmental blandness to allow the young unemployed to state their own case in terms which aggressively refuse to let us pity them. The concert footage doesn't always combine ideally with the background material and Ford (trained at the Polish Film School) is a little overfond of fish-eye lenses. But this is easily compensated for by one early sequence of interviews, starting with a 'what do you want to do when you grow up?' session in a primary school; then, almost without one noticing, the kids being interviewed are older, until the sequence ends with a group of school-leavers who have long since abandoned the idea of a *choice* of job, and all but abandoned hope of a job of *any* kind. Coming out among all that skilfully vapid film-making and from behind the yellow flowers the LFF so loves, it was a moment which helped to put the festival in some kind of context.

SOHO

Two weeks in another town

Nick Roddick

'Dirty movies have gotten better, I'm told. Smut and weaponry are the two areas in which we've improved. Everything else has gotten worse.'

—Joseph Heller, *Something Happened*

Two things need to be said about Joseph Heller's statement (apart from the fact that I am quoting it out of context). The first is that, when it was written—in the mid-70s—dirty movies did seem to be getting better. It was the age of *Deep Throat*, *The Devil in Miss Jones* and *Behind the Green Door*. As with horror movies before them, the ensured profitability of porn flicks meant that a number of directors found that as long as they provided the bare minimum of the genre, they could produce an art movie masquerading as an exploitation flick (or vice versa). Only some film-makers—Gerard Damiano, Radley Metzger and Wakefield Poole, for example—took up the challenge, but they were rewarded by becoming briefly chic: blue movies were 'in', Linda Lovelace became a cult figure, and a highly respectable New York publisher like

Praeger brought out Kenneth Turan and Stephen Zito's *Sinema*. Ms Lovelace has since denounced all that, of course, and blue movies are no longer chic. They have gone back to being furtive experiences for businessmen between appointments, football fans between opening times, and the whole sad panoply of male punters who wander round Soho pretending not to look at the pictures outside the clubs, topless bars and nude encounter studios. Dirty movies have, as a result, gotten worse again.

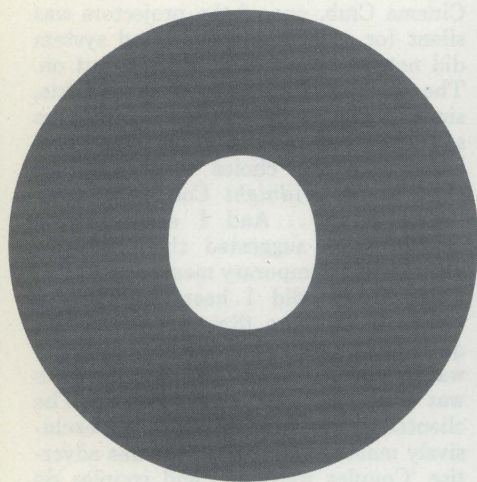
The other thing about Heller's remark is that it is indirect: he's only been 'told' that dirty movies have gotten better. His hero, Bob Slocum, has no problem about admitting to any number of unpleasant thoughts and acts—*Something Happened* is a novel which raises self-loathing to the level of an art form—but he is not going to tell us he paid to see a dirty movie. People who admit it almost invariably claim to have done so at someone's party, or on a trip to Copenhagen, Hamburg or 42nd Street. Then, it all becomes either a sign of radical chic—a kind of visual cocaine—or else a brave sociological expedition fuelled by the desire for greater knowledge of a foreign culture rather than the half-admitted intention of being turned on. Paul Schrader who, on the available evidence, understands more about guilt than most people, uses dirty moviegoing as one of the two key emblems of modern ambiguity, the other being violence. He usually manages to equate them.

All in all, the man in the dirty raincoat doesn't have a lot going for him. His vice, far from being a source of male camaraderie in the face of feminist scorn, is looked down on by both groups. In the cinemas themselves, he is unlikely to find the sense of belonging that many sexual service industries provide: the cramped interiors are filled with little islands of isolated furtiveness whose only unifying factor (beyond the furtiveness) is that they all, to judge by the quality of the projection facilities and a dozen other details, are held in equal contempt by the people who run the cinemas. The latter are, after all, wholly confident that

their clientele will not draw attention to themselves by complaining: if they had wanted to become physically involved, they would have chosen another kind of establishment. So, if the sound fails, the silence is total. If the film breaks, the audience waits until the projectionist notices. This can take a while, since he is generally also the cashier, the doorman and the bookseller.

In the past two weeks I have spent a total of about 24 hours—under, of course, the sociological guarantee of a survey for SIGHT AND SOUND—as an island of furtiveness in Soho cinemas whose seating is anything from 200 to 15, whose projection facilities range from 35mm down to third-generation video dupes, and whose films run from the barely passable to the unspeakably tedious. I don't know quite what I expected, but what I got was a two-week course in aversion therapy. In no real sense can the films be described as erotic; and, with one or two rare exceptions, they are not particularly distasteful. They are merely boring. Though my own reactions are probably not typical, I saw no sign, outward or otherwise, of joy, disgust, amusement or animation of any kind among my fellow patrons.

All the same, any survey of the Soho blue movie trade must obviously include some comments on the nature of the filmgoing experience. And it is exceptional. The cinemas advertise no times of showing, merely opening hours. In some cases, they advertise the duration of the programme, though this is not always reliable: a 'full 2-hour programme' in one case lasted 55 minutes. Some of the more respectable-looking cinemas advertise the titles of the films, but this rarely corresponds with the actual programme, even allowing for the fact that few of the films actually have credits. Thus for the first time in maybe twenty years I found myself thinking 'This is where I came in' and getting up to leave. Since blue movies have by and large achieved the goal of the structural film movement of the 70s—the superseding of narrative—it makes little difference where one comes in or goes out. And anyway, films frequently have reels missing and start in



medias res. Res, of course, means intercourse—oral, vaginal or manual. The films often promise scenes of anal intercourse, but since this is still illegal in Britain, even heterosexually, the scenes are usually cut.

The most startling thing about Soho's sex cinemas is that they are, virtually any time during the afternoon or evening, around three-quarters full. Not counting video peep show booths and view-before-you-buy sex film shops, there are—or were when I did this survey—36 sex cinemas in Soho, comprising 39 auditoria. At an average of 60 seats per auditorium—obviously an estimate, but based on as close an observation as I could manage—that amounts to over 2,000 seats. And I can virtually guarantee that, for most of the time, there are more patrons, at between £2 and £4 a ticket, in the Soho sex cinemas than there are in the legitimate West End cinemas (an assessment confirmed by the police). Something like 5,000 people a day see sex films in Soho. Suggestions that sex cinemas exist to launder Mafia money seem fanciful: blue movies are big business. The running costs are minimal—far less than a live club—and the potential takings considerable. The risks are not all that great, certainly not for companies used to operating on the fringes of or just outside the law. It is possible that all this will change as a result of the Cinematograph (Amendment) Act 1982, which came into effect on 13 October, but confident prophecies that the blue movie joints will be closed down seem, to put it mildly, optimistic.

Soho's sex cinemas are concentrated in a fairly small area at the south end of the district. They are clustered mainly round the Moor Street/Old Compton Street/Brewer Street axis, and at the lower ends of the main north-south streets, from Frith Street to Berwick Street. Between Shaftesbury Avenue and Leicester Square there are only three: Chinatown evidently has been able to resist the takeover of premises better than the older immigrant groups who have been evicted from their foodshops



Corner of Brewer Street. Photograph: Nick Roddick.

and restaurants in the Berwick Street/Brewer Street/Walkers Court area. They have, says Lois Peltz, the independent Westminster City Councillor for Soho, 'mushroomed everywhere with apparent impunity.' They break planning laws with their neon signs; they break fire regulations with their interiors; and in many cases, change of use has not been properly registered. These are the things, rather than the nature of the trade, which form the basis for local opposition.

'It is the delicate balance of inter-related activities that is in danger of being destroyed by the action of the pornographers,' wrote Soho Society Chairman Leslie Hardcastle in a recent statement. 'The presence of sex shops drives out business. Ordinary customers are increasingly reluctant to come to the area; if there are fewer specialist establishments there is less passing of customers from shop to shop. The customers brought into the area by the sex industry have one object only; they are hardly likely to buy vegetables from the local street markets.' In point of fact, the sex industry's customers have several objects, but the remark about the vegetables is true. And because the sex industry is so profitable, it can afford to pay rents over the odds, thereby confirming the exodus of many of the district's more traditional establishments.

Because the rents there were originally lower, the sex cinemas have concentrated in what used to be the main food retail area. It was, reckons Councillor Peltz, the hint of new legislation at the time of the Williams Committee hearings that led to this: the proprietors aimed to present legislators with a *de facto* red light district. Be this as it may, the only sex cinema outside the main concentration (and one of the few to be properly licensed), the Dilly Cinema Club in Great Windmill Street, has gone legitimate again. Although the signs outside still promise 'fabulous close-up acts and sensual beauty in exciting hard core action' and that 'all films shown are masterpieces of international erotology', the Dilly now shows, at £3 a time, old certificated movies like *Emanuelle 3*, *Emanuelle in Tokyo* and *Young Lady Chatterley*. A movable blur has been applied to the print in certain scenes—a sort of pale

grey fuzz which dances round like Tinkerbell, hiding the naughty bits. According to James Ferman of the BBFC, this is a common method of censorship in Japan, where the showing of pubic hairs is forbidden.

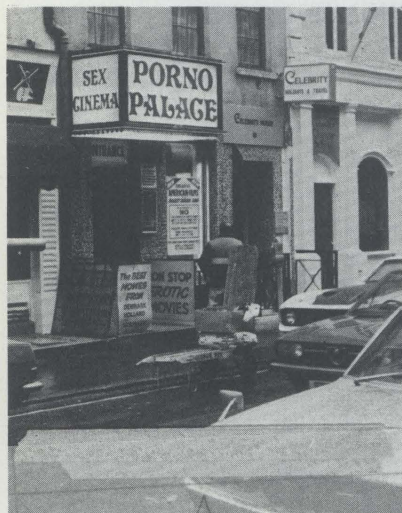
In the genuine hardcore houses, conditions vary. Some are relatively plush if slightly run-down cinemas, others are stuffy basements with the walls painted black and electric flex hanging loose—'holes in the ground', in the words of Inspector Stonestreet at West End Central police station. Some have cashiers' desks and proper tickets; others simply have tables littered with styrofoam cups of congealing coffee from behind which a man takes pound notes. Prices vary from £2 at the Continental Blue Film Club (home of the 55-minute 2-hour programme), where this is advertised as a 'Special Weekday Price' from Monday to Friday and a 'Special Weekend Price' at weekends, to £4 at the Spartacus Gay Cinema Club. Most of the cinemas still call themselves clubs (though the new Act renders this irrelevant), but membership is invariably instant, and there is rarely any attempt to comply with the legal requirements of club membership: only twice in two weeks was a membership list produced for me to sign, and there was no sign of a membership card. The usual running time of a programme is two hours, though it can be less. One or two of the cinemas sport double auditoria, so it is possible to get four hours' viewing for the price of two. One cinema offers films, a nude encounter, a topless bar and a live show for the all-in price of £3. I didn't try it.

Programmes are continuous. There are two basic systems: a projection TV linked to a video player which throws an image, frequently so murky that one is grateful for the tendency of the performers to mug outrageously in the brief narrative scenes, and liable to break down, lose its sound or pick up massive interference. Cinemas using film—almost always 16mm film, whatever the sign outside may say—rely on two projectors with 30 minutes of film in each. A typical reel will consist of three or four short narratives, often starting in the middle of a scene, with leader and countdowns between them. In many of the cinemas,

when a reel ends the film will come out of the gate and flap around on the take-up reel until someone comes and turns on the other projector. At the Queen's Cinema Club, one of the projectors was silent (or at any rate its sound system did not work) and a record was put on. The film itself was obviously a talkie, since there were numerous dialogue scenes. There were signs of a sense of humour in the choice of record—the theme from *Midnight Cowboy*, 'Everybody's talkin'... And I can't hear a word'—which suggested that this was more than a temporary measure.

Only twice did I hear an audience laugh (though the films are sometimes quite funny, even intentionally), and that was in a large, full cinema where doing so was unlikely to attract attention. The clientele is almost, but not quite, exclusively male. A number of cinemas advertise 'Couples welcome', and couples do occasionally take up the offer. Single women are unknown. Beyond the fact that they are 99 per cent male, it is hard to generalise about audiences. They range from adolescents to OAPs, with many of the cinemas advertising concessionary rates for the latter. The one consistent impression I gained was that sex flicks were very popular with businessmen on their way home.

Narratively speaking, the films (or tapes) have one basic aim: to get their characters to fuck. As a result, they are like a bizarre reversal of the old Hollywood love scene, where the build-up to the encounter is protracted and the encounter itself elided. Here, the build-up is reduced to a minimum and the encounter extremely protracted, with one fuck lasting up to fifteen minutes and going through a variety of positions, generally dictated by the need to get a good camera angle, and accompanied by a symphony of groans, sighs and formulaic endearments, in most cases dubbed on afterwards with little attempt at lip synch. The act itself is shown in such graphically anatomical detail as to be totally unerotic—strangely similar, after a while, to those shots of needles being stuck into veins in films about drug addiction. The films have one inflexible requirement: the male orgasm or 'come



shot'. This is their main guarantee of authenticity—a determination to show that nothing has been faked—and tends to mean that, whatever else has happened before, the act will end with fellatio or masturbation. Since female orgasms cannot be 'shown' in the same way—a point which offers rich ground for Lacanian theoretical inquiry—they are less crucial, though almost all the films I saw at any rate suggested that the women came too.

The films shown in Soho originate, as far as one can make out from the few that still have credits, in America, Germany and France. One surprise was that, in two weeks fairly intensive viewing, I didn't see the same film twice. There are some trade names: Taboo (sometimes Tabu) Films, made in England and Germany; Starlight Films (German); Swedish Erotica, made in California by something called the Caballero Control Corporation; and some highly idiosyncratic New York films. Many of the German films have quite complex storylines, but since they are usually in German without subtitles, the average Soho punter is unlikely to be able to follow them. One memorable film, entitled *Orgie im Love Hotel* and with German dialogue, turned out to be French made (to judge by street signs, car licence plates and the fact that everyone used francs) and dubbed into German. Often, one gets the impression that the dubbers have not had access to a script—or don't speak the language in question—and are making up dialogue which might conceivably explain the behaviour of the characters. Tabu Film puts out trailers for its forthcoming attractions: *Negliges and Lace Panties* offers 'the delicate exposure of all the tender delights of an underwear fetish'; *Fantasmasex* promises to involve a bizarre stop-frame animation sequence of a 'talking pussy' which eats dildos, smokes and is tidied up by a tiny blue-overalled workman with a broom.

Production values vary. In some they are, to put it politely, minimal. In others, particularly Taboo and Swedish Erotica, they are quite lavish, involving several locations, costumes and a cast of up to ten. Swedish Erotica films are more or less alone in offering any kind of foreplay, but it is the East Coast American films

which come closest to providing a degree of interest. In one, a woman explains her food fetishism to a doctor. A flashback shows her making love to two men and an eight foot torpedo sandwich, gasping 'Oh, my God, the sandwich is your body, the tomato is your cock . . . Oh, rub me with the baloney!' Then, finally, in outraged disbelief: 'You came before I got the pickle?' There was also a beginningless and endless clip set on a version of the Starship Enterprise with, to confuse sources, a See-Threepio lookalike who is not programmed to come and goes haywire when he does, and a cowboy romp with the deathless line 'Hey! It's a different shape from my brother's!'

Most of the films are so thin on plot that they are impossible to summarise, but the following are some of the more ambitious:

Jolly Hockey Sticks (Taboo, probably English). Three girls train in the gym with the hockey mistress. One of the girls stays behind and is seduced by the hockey mistress. The other two go off with their boyfriends and fuck. The film cuts back and forth between the three encounters.

Dirty Weekend (American). Two New York secretaries on holiday in California run out of money and decide to earn \$300 by selling themselves. They make a good deal more with a variety of men (some of whom have difficulty maintaining their erections, causing one of the girls to look despairingly at the camera; a hand appears and waves her back to work). They make nearly \$800, then dupe the house detective who wants in on the action.

Ten Days Leave (Swedish Erotica, American). Some (presumably stock) shots of action in Vietnam. Two soldiers dream of getting back to the United States. Meanwhile, one of the men's wives is seduced by her (female) friend. The two soldiers return. Husband fucks wife, friend fucks friend. The film cuts quite inventively back and forth between the two.

Untitled 18th century story (English). An orgy at a country house, with a cast of twelve, fairly authentic costumes and well-dressed sets. Milord chases wenches round the grounds, milady has the footman pleasure her in her bath. Guests

arrive for an orgy, but milady again slips away for a more private encounter with a guest. Her husband drags her downstairs and has her gang raped, but her erstwhile lover challenges him to a duel. Naked people gather at dawn, vaguely fondling one another. His lordship misses and milady's lover shoots his rival's cock off.

The last, the unpleasantness of whose outline is partly mitigated by the general good humour of the whole undertaking, is distinctly untypical of current Soho fare for its (admittedly brief) scenes of rape and mutilation: there is even a crude special effect at the end, culminating in a severed dildo twitching and finally ejaculating to comic wah-wah music on the ground. The Soho cinemas no longer seem to cater to the specialist trade, although specialist videos are available under-the-counter in most sex shops. The majority of the films are reasonably wholesome, and although the market for them is undoubtedly male-oriented, the films themselves seem reasonably sexually egalitarian. If anything, the genre's one rule—the come shot—means that there is more footage of male organs than female, and the traditional macho notion that the most virile male is the one who can drive a woman wild with delight tends to mean that there is a good deal of emphasis on the female partner having an orgasm. The Soho sex industry is clearly patriarchal to the nth degree, but the films it shows are rather less so than *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* and generally evince a greater degree of respect for basic human dignity than, say, *Blade Runner*.

The exception to this came in the only two semi-specialist cinemas I visited: the Spankarama Spanking Viewing Lounge, and the Spartacus Gay Cinema Club. The videos shown at the Spankarama were of the worst technical quality of any I saw in the two weeks, but the 'lounge'—a tiny, stuffy basement with 25 seats—was packed out at 1.30 on a Saturday afternoon. The videos eschew all the trappings of the normal sex cinemas for a series of playlets in which young girls, generally dressed in gym slips and sensible knickers (as opposed to the no-knickers and suspender belts which are standard elsewhere) are placed across the knees of middle-aged men and spanked,



or made to bend over a table and whipped. There is a great deal of build-up (well over half the playing time) in which the emphasis is on humiliation. A sample piece of dialogue goes as follows: HEADMASTER: You're the new girl, are you? How are you finding your first day? NEW GIRL: It's very confusing. There are so many rules.

HEADMASTER: Of course there are, my dear. The more rules there are, the more difficult it is for a girl to get through the day without breaking one.

NEW GIRL: But I don't know what rule I've broken.

HEADMASTER: It doesn't matter what rule you've broken. The important thing is what happens to you when you break one. And you know what happens to you when you break one, don't you?

NEW GIRL (barely audibly): Yes sir.

HEADMASTER: What's that?

NEW GIRL (louder): Yes sir.

HEADMASTER: That's better. Yes, you get spanked.

The camera remains in fixed medium shot of the girl's bare bottom as it turns pink beneath the spanking (a colour rendered all the more lurid by the quality of the video) or as the welts of the whipping appear. The sets are well dressed and there are casts of up to eight. The videos can be bought at the ticket desk.

The Spartacus Gay Cinema Club was perhaps the most depressing visit of all. It is a tiny back room behind a notional bookstore, with a £4 admission charge and a membership register containing only first names. It boasts a mere 16 seats (several broken) but held, late Saturday afternoon, upwards of 25 men, mainly standing at the sides. The films are silent and on 8mm with taped disco music. The films have no credits and consist of non-stop masturbation, licking, fellatio and sodomy carried out in cowboy boots, in apartments, on the back of a jeep in the desert, in a gym, on a park bench... The performers never smile, and there are frequent close-ups of boots on bodies. The films are American.

Hardcore movies and videos have largely taken over the cinematic dirty raincoat trade, forcing out the once ubiquitous softcore flicks which, as recently as 1978, accounted for over 20 per cent of all features released in Britain. The latter were shown in regular cinemas, alternating with 'general interest' movies, but the shift towards hardcore has brought this area of cinema firmly into the hands of the Soho sex trade.

Beyond their interest as an area of rampant growth in an industry otherwise thought to be on its last legs, then, porn movies raise a couple of other interesting points: their legality and their place, if any, in the history of film. The first is a notoriously difficult question to tackle. As the Williams Committee observed in its 1979 Command Paper, when it comes to obscenity 'the law... is a mess'. The act which is most susceptible of being used against hardcore movies is the Obscene Publications Act of 1959. This enshrines the now infamous 'deprave and

corrupt' definition of obscenity, and is as flexible as the jury members in a particular case. Since a case at Portsmouth in October 1975 (cited by the Williams Committee) which found that 'photographs of straightforward sexual activity between adults, whether heterosexual or homosexual and however explicit, were not obscene,' the possibility of Soho's blue movies being convicted under the Act has been far from certain. Councillor Peltz believes, however, that the Williams Committee Report was out of date before it was published: 'the stance of the country has hardened.' She may well be right: in the first half of 1982, there were 16 cases of successful prosecution, most of them concerning films, and in some cases resulting in terms of imprisonment of up to a year. It is, says the Clubs Office at West End Central police station, a 'changing situation'.

It will change even more in the months to come. On 13 October the Cinematograph (Amendment) Act 1982 became law. It has a number of effects (discussed elsewhere in this issue), but the most significant for the sex cinemas is that it withdraws the exemption from certification granted to 'clubs': they will now be required to show films which have a certificate. The 1982 Act also subjects the premises to more stringent safety checks—which many of them will clearly not pass—and is to be given bite by the appointment of 13 new staff in the GLC area to carry out inspections. Since the Act came into effect, the GLC licensing department has received upwards of 60 applications from the Soho area, and many of the premises now prominently display photostats of their applications. Since the Act gives no period of grace and since many of the applications post-date 13 October, the clubs are as illegal now as, technically, they have ever been. But the police freely admit that the problems involved in making a prosecution stick are frequently not worth it, given the penalties imposed. Since the cinema clubs—with one notorious exception—generally keep a very low profile, they tend to be tolerated.

One more tangible effect of 13 October is the extensive ructions it has caused in the sex trade itself. The new Act gives the police the right to object to the granting of any of the new entertainment licences to known villains, and this has occasioned some hasty restructuring of companies and a shuffling of directorships to make sure that the names on the applications are clean. As a result, it proved impossible to find anyone on the production and distribution side of the business who was prepared to talk about it. Repeated telephone calls to Quietlyn, formerly Conegate, the company set up by David Sullivan to publish magazines such as *Whitehouse* and *Climax* and to make films like *Emanuelle in Soho*, failed to produce anyone who would talk, even unattributably. The telephone numbers for Taboo Films International and Stonerealm (three of whose directors were jailed last year) have been disconnected. A call to one cinema in Brewer Street—a listed number—elicited the fol-

lowing response: 'The Governor, he say, if anyone phone up, say he is from the press, we're not interested.' The people who were trying to close them down, I suggested, were ready enough to talk: might a little balance not be a good idea? 'The Governor, he say, is for nothing. Is worse when they go in the papers, you know what I say, my friend? Thank you.' Click. According to one source, who preferred not to be named, many of the cinemas are run by Maltese ex-ponces. I pass on the information for what it is worth.

Clearly the films being shown in the Soho sex cinemas will not qualify for an X certificate as things now stand. Whether they will qualify for the proposed new 'club certificate' (18R) is harder to say. Certainly James Ferman, Secretary of the BBFC, can't yet say. He is understandably cautious. 'We're under a legal compulsion not to authorise anything that is illegal.' Since what is illegal remains ambiguous, he is currently involved in protracted consultations with lawyers, and a number of the clubs have voluntarily submitted films for guidance. One thing he is adamant about, however, is that he will not allow scenes of rape and sadistic sex. But clearly some of the porno cinemas will remain. He cites the case of France, where, after a brief surge in the mid-70s, the porn movie business has settled down to cater for a small but steady market. Club owners make a similar point: their patrons come back regularly to sit in silence before the screen.

To pass an overall critical judgment on an entire area of film-making on the basis of fewer than 100 films, some of them lasting a mere 10 minutes, is not something I am prepared to do. My personal feeling is that they occupy a position in film culture approximately equivalent to gardening films, though with the emphasis on showing people doing it rather than how to do it. The experience of seeing them may be degrading because of the pervasive furtiveness—I remain convinced that the key stage in the porn moviegoing experience is going in off the street to buy a ticket—but the films themselves are not especially degrading. They turn people into objects, but that is a feature they share with much of our culture.

The area in which they are most indicative of other forms of cinema is in the circumstances of their exhibition: they take to its logical conclusion the veiled contempt in which the British moviegoer seems increasingly to be held by the exhibitor. They are not, the man from West End Central pointed out, clip joints: they sell what they advertise. But they do seem to do so under the worst of conditions. As long as there are people fucking on the screen, then the hell with focus, soundtrack, screen ratio, lousy edits, mangled reel ends, scratch image tracks and noise from front of house. Mutatis mutandis, I know quite a few Odeons and ABCs like that. And at least the porno cinemas don't pretend that fifteen minutes of advertising and a ten-minute film about penguins makes a full supporting programme. ■

"A masterpiece... quite simply the most exciting British feature film since I can't remember when... hip, stylish, erotic and subversive unlike anything you've ever seen" Time Out

"Dazzling and intelligent" City Limits

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"Quite remarkable" The Times



The Draughtsman's Contract ^{AA}

A film by PETER GREENAWAY

starring ANTHONY HIGGINS JANET SUZMAN ANNE LOUISE LAMBERT Music by MICHAEL NYMAN

Produced by the British Film Institute in association with Channel Four Television

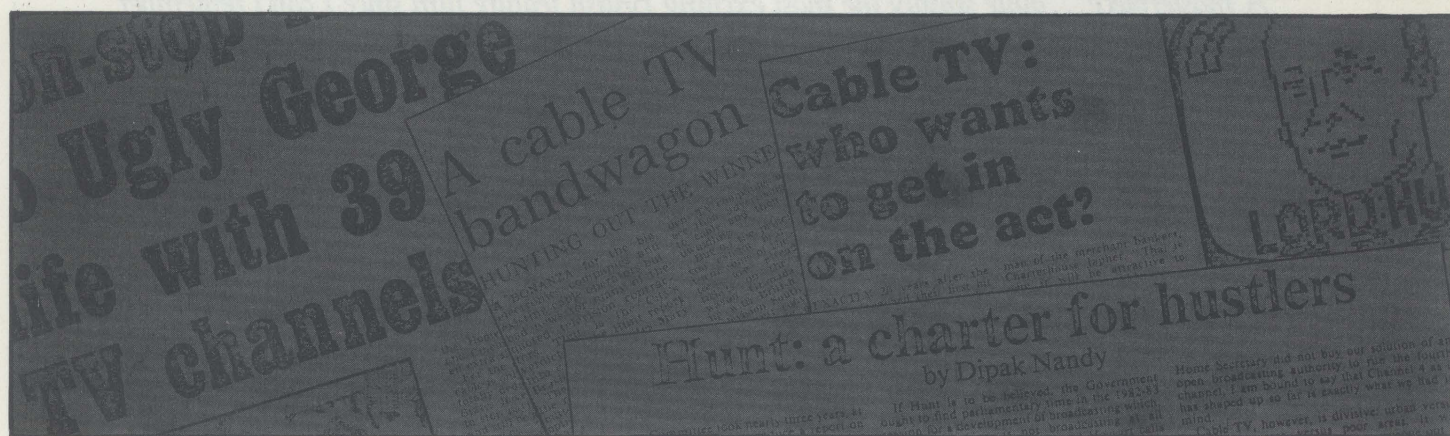
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BEFORE THE REVOLUTION

12 October 1982. The Hunt report recommends that cable television should go ahead in Britain with no limit to the number of channels offered and as few restrictions as possible. A new cable authority should be established to award franchises and monitor performance of cable operators whose programme schedules would not require advance approval. Some channels should be available for leased use—but central and local government, political parties and organisations, and religious bodies should be excluded from operating these. Other proposed safeguards are that the system should carry all existing BBC and ITV services, that cable should not be allowed to obtain exclusive rights for certain national sporting events, that for the time being pay-per-view should not be permitted as a method of payment for individual cable programmes, and that the cable authority should consider complaints and impose sanctions (the ultimate penalty being loss of franchise) on any operator whose programmes offended the standards of good taste and decency already applied by the BBC and IBA. The only exception to this would be subscription channels, capable of being electronically locked by the subscriber, which could show x certificate films or their equivalent (but not video porn) at any time of the day or night.

First reactions. Despite unseemly panic on the eve of publication ('With its ability to measure who is listening to what, how, why and when, it [i.e. cable] could produce sociological profiles of our societies and people, which could be dynamite, and make 1984 look like a school picnic,' BBC TV managing director Aubrey

Singer had told staff), the BBC seemed quite relieved. 'We're very pleased they took on board the two main recommendations we put to them,' said director general Alasdair Milne. (These were for disallowing pay-per-view, and for preventing cable from buying up big sporting events.)

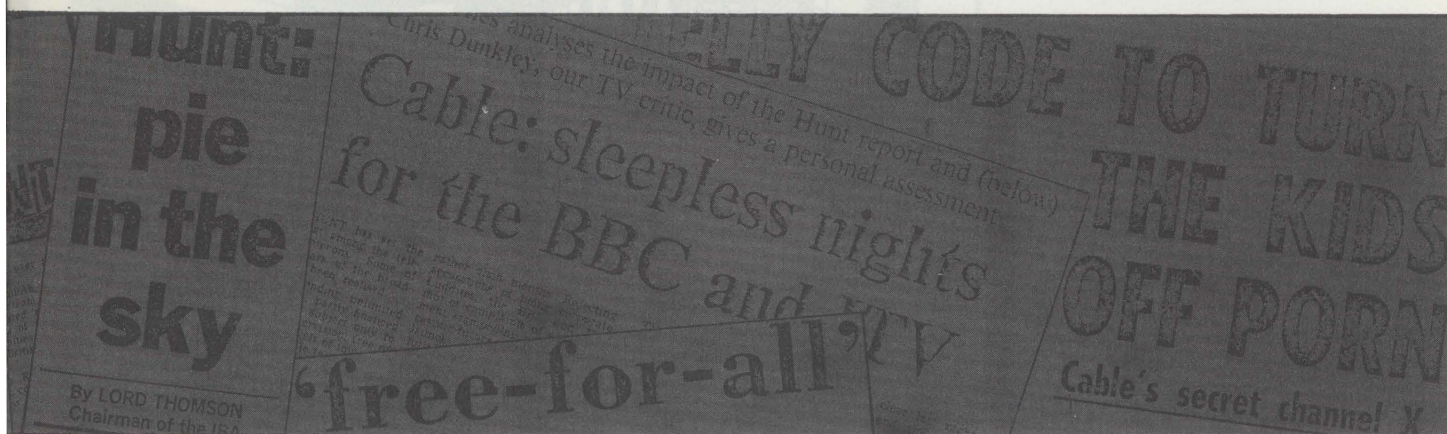
'The IBA is really very disappointed ... not at the decision to propose a new authority but at the arrangements made to regulate the general pattern and standards of cable television,' said IBA chairman Lord Thomson. 'I must say frankly that if the Hunt committee had recommended that the IBA should be the supervisory authority for the proposals they make I would have declined to preside over such a body.' The technicians' union ACTT called it 'a get-rich-quick recipe for the cable buccaneers: it is bad for the public, bad for the industry and bad for the people who work in it.' Mrs Mary Whitehouse said, 'The Government must introduce legislation which governs the use of pornographic and violently obscene material in broadcasting.' British Telecom looked forward to playing an active role in cable ... and so on. As usual, only the viewers' opinion was unsought. What are the implications of the Hunt report for them, for us?

A backward glance at the remarkably short history of plans for cable expansion may be helpful. As recently as autumn 1981 at the Edinburgh International Television Festival, Britain's former ambassador to the United States, now chairman of TV-AM Peter Jay was arguing the case for the deregulation of broadcasting in a MacTaggart lecture which he called 'The Day After Tomorrow' and described as 'quite explicitly and delib-

erately futuristic.' His proposition was that, with the disappearance of 'spectrum scarcity', television could be treated in exactly the same way as any other branch of publishing, subject only to the general laws of the land. He foresaw opposition to this 'on every pretext of public interest known to man save the true one of resistance to competition—allied to the usual desire of every politician, busybody and self-appointed cultural and moral nanny to lay down what other people may and may not communicate to one another.' In Jay's utopia 'the IBA would disappear, and the BBC would cease to be a broadcasting authority with self-regulatory powers and duties.' Well, plainly the Hunt committee has not taken these recommendations on board.

By Edinburgh 1982 everybody knew that, for better or worse, cable was on its way. The Information Technology Advisory Panel's report had proved that, if nothing else. In his article in *SIGHT AND SOUND* (Summer 1982) Brian Winston wastes a lot of space demolishing this document which was undisputedly based on submissions from twenty-one organisations with commercial and manufacturing interests in cable expansion, and merely represented the Government's first move to test out the financial viability of the idea.

The 1982 TV Festival Programme carried much material relevant to the whole cable issue, of which a shortened version of Winston's article stood at one extreme, and an equally acerbic argument by Paul Johnson, for the total dissolution of the present set-up and the democratisation of television, at the other. 'British TV is, in effect, a gigantic system of patronage. It is quangoland. No one is elected. No one is chosen by the market,' wrote Johnson, claiming that the system only endures 'because there are enough jobs and privileges going to keep the centre of the ruling elite reasonably content ... Everyone is cut in, except the people. The latest gimmick of duopoly, Channel Four—which of course is only ITV-2 in reality—is designed to create the illusion of participation. But, be it noted, this will not be genuine participation, in which people will be allowed to set up their own stations. Quite the contrary—certain interest-groups, certified as respectable by the progressive consensus,



will be given air-time under the control of the radical elite which runs the channel.'

Johnson saw the rapid growth of the video market in predominantly working-class areas as reflecting the people's 'instinctive, but also quite rational desire to escape from the supervision of their betters ... Big Brother and Big Sister can do nothing about it.' Cable and satellite should complete this process, he hoped, except that 'those who have a vested interest in retaining monopoly will put up a ferocious rearguard action. They include those well dug into the present system, such as the BBC, the unions, the licensed money-printers and quangos like the British Film Institute, as well as openly restrictive bodies like the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association. ... A fundamentally immoral, inequitable and undemocratic system is justified on the grounds that exclusiveness produces excellence. In my view it produces cultural uniformity—quite a different thing.'

At the 1982 festival, Jay attracted much controversy by comically comparing the conference with an imaginary meeting around the year 1400 when a chap called Medici was recommending the Renaissance to a gathering of monks and barons who asked questions like 'Who wants it? Who's going to pay for it?' In fact the answers to these questions are unsatisfactory. The Conservative Government wants the cable revolution to stimulate the economy by creating grid-laying jobs and such, and by launching on the back of the entertainment industry a so far uncalled for range of armchair services from shopping, banking and voting to gambling and signalling for help.

Still, as Granada chairman Sir Denis Forman pointed out, TV itself was started by people who made television sets. The City is apparently keen to invest, but if the whole thing folds, no doubt the Government (i.e. us) will have to bail us out. If on the other hand it works, this could be because we are actually getting something we want. We don't have to be connected to the grid, after all. We can choose. We would of course be in a much stronger position to choose if the Hunt committee's gift to the BBC—the (possibly short-term) ban on pay-per-view—

were not among the recommendations to be implemented. But even an all-or-nothing choice means that the extended services must satisfy some real demand, and this is a new concept in British broadcasting. Also it seems unlikely that any regulation of programme content on a possible infinity of channels could ultimately be enforced. Is it the Renaissance, or is Winston's frightening dissection of the American cable scene a portent of things to come?

Brian Winston's description of the rubbish proliferating on US cable makes a strong impression on all of us who know what television rubbish looks like, albeit 'quality' rubbish. British rubbish, which looms larger during peak viewing hours than anyone ever seems to mention these days, is not made for the likes of us. It's made for all those others whose preferences the ratings allegedly reflect—and if Winston really believes that public service broadcasting still 'enshrines a view ... that the tyranny of the ratings needs to be resisted', I honestly think he should take a closer look at the workings of British television today. Having seen practically no American television apart from the programmes bought in here, I believe Winston's opinion, give and take a few quibbles. I wish he had stayed longer with what was presumably Ted Turner's pioneering 24-hour news service which was always doing gardening segments when he flipped to it, because according to Melvyn Bragg (1982's festival chairman), Turner's Cable News Network is 'a very high quality service'. The fact that the giant ABC network was reported as likely to pay cable operators a dollar a home to take their 24-hour news alternative, suggests that here at least it is the network, not cable, that is carpet-bagging. And certainly the reasons why anyone might not be watching Turner's service merit examination.

Also I find it hard to reconcile Winston's wholly negative response with the fact that Reiner Moritz (the cultural impresario whose co-production deals have resulted in more arts programmes on the BBC and elsewhere than could ever otherwise have been afforded) picked on Manhattan as one of his favourite cable places. 'In spite of the same movie re-appearing, there is so much offered,' he said. In fact, the worst that Winston has

to say about US cable is that the three proven areas of it 'are creating no new material. It all comes from somewhere else.'

There is of course a lot of material from somewhere else, not least the archives of the world from 1895 till now, that I would enjoy seeing however cheaply it is purchased from the entrepreneurs and middlemen who generally lay claim to such stuff now, and who are very often the equivalent of the sovereign producers and successful businessmen who managed to exploit so many artist/film-makers in the first place. Money is power but, as we know, it has never had very much to do with real creative values. Although television drama can cost £350,000 an hour or more, the writer of an original screenplay would be unlikely to get more than 1 per cent of the total budget. Also it is a matter of rational self-interest for those ensconced in any industry to keep production costs up even when new technologies (e.g. lightweight video equipment, etc. in TV) are making it increasingly possible to bring them down. The resistance to cable is exactly the same as the resistance to cheaper production methods which, far from spreading the jam more thinly, could obviously result in more jam being made.

To the broadcasting establishment the worst offence of the ITAP report was that it signalled a decision being taken above their heads. They rightly called for a debate and started it themselves. 'Television in Transition' (i.e. cable and satellite) was the main subject of the 1982 TV festival, which was attended by about 600 delegates including almost everyone who is anyone in British television, and which made compulsive viewing—a political drama of the highest order scripted by some of the best brains in the business. Never is such a revealing picture of the anatomy of British TV allowed to emerge from the box itself. Among the star cast strange alliances sprang up: the unions with the entrenched establishment, idealists with freebooters, men of principle alongside those with vested interests of all kinds.

Shortly after Minister for Information Technology Kenneth Baker had given



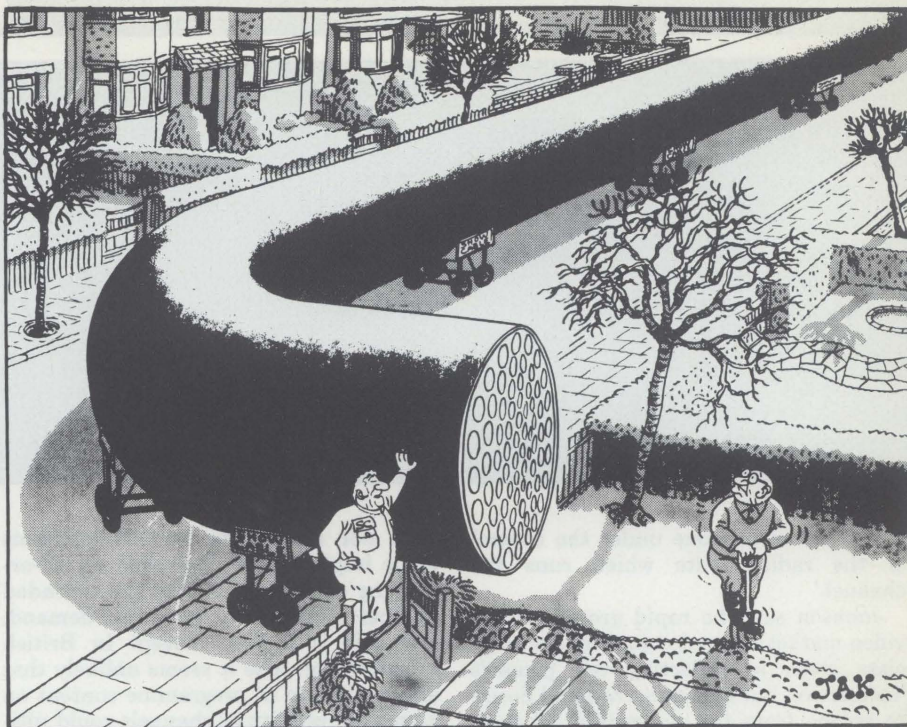
confirmation from the platform of the Government's firm commitment to cabling up Britain, came perhaps the most astounding moment of an amazing week: turning to IBA chairman Lord Thomson, BBC chairman George Howard recommended that the IBA should be given the regulation of cable. It was an unprecedented manoeuvre in favour of an erstwhile formidable competitor, but the threat of cable uncontrollably running rife was unprecedented too, and helped to engender a spirit of almost wartime camaraderie all round.

So many broadcasting chiefs were apparently dedicated to the idea of women's equality (and black equality of course, for apparently no distinction dare be drawn now between the two) that you began to wonder if the scene had suddenly changed out of all recognition back at base. Programmes of the future were never discussed. Perhaps you would have had to be exceedingly naive to divulge ideas of that sort in this particular gathering. As Harold Evans, former editor of *The Times* and now a director of Goldcrest Films and Television, put it: 'I can think of four marvellous cable channel programming ideas, but I am not going to tell you about them because, as they say in Los Angeles, you'll either piss on them or steal them.'

There was much talk of money, and many meticulous calculations were made of likely costs and probable returns in a commercial set-up the *modus operandi* of which could only be guessed at. Almost hourly, somebody bemoaned the fate of programmes like *Panorama* and *World in Action* because only long shelf-life would make expensive products pay and, as Chris Dunkley put it, 'there is no shelf-life in yesterday's current affairs.' If you had seen the immense corporate pride taken in both these programmes, you could hardly have believed that each loses many potential viewers as a result of a deliberate policy to put them out at the same time. Only those who have recourse to video recorders can possibly escape that tyranny as well as the kind of scheduling that overlaps arts programmes and the best movies and most of the non-rubbish across all existing channels (because it even happens between BBC1 and 2) as often as not in the dead vast and middle of the night.

Regulated scheduling, as it currently operates, is certainly not for the benefit of the consumer who only has a basic TV set. It also fragments the audience for quality programmes to an extent that must cast suspicion on the evidence of ratings. The opponents of cable may say this fragmentation is minor by comparison with what will happen when BBC ratings cease to justify the licence money and ITV ones to attract advertisers, and there is nowhere any audience large enough to make expensive products pay, but what they are forgetting is the extended range of the whole thing. A few satellites can cover the globe. As Reiner Moritz observed, the problem boils down to copyright.

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"Where do you want the Cable TV connected, guv?"

The 1982 MacTaggart lecturer, owner of two 24-hour Cable News Networks (CNN1 and CNN2) in Atlanta and satellite pioneer Ted Turner, had the answer to the problem of fragmentation. 'You sell your quality programmes to me,' he said. 'You sell them all over the world.' Harold Evans said he had been discussing a British 24-hour news service with Turner and intended to apply for a franchise if cable expansion went ahead. Apparently ITN and the BBC are also interested. The way this would work is that the British arm of the operation would contribute only British news, and likewise everywhere that had a news gathering system. Ted Turner's personal appearance (for he just rambled on rather than delivering a formal lecture) was perhaps the most improbable and least debated event of the whole festival.

'I intend,' he said, 'to conquer the world... But instead of conquering it with bombs... I intend to conquer it with ideas, with good ideas... A lot of people will read but the majority of people today in the world will not read, so what we have to do is bring them the message via television... What we need to do is truly want to have peace and redirect the amount of money that's going into these sophisticated nuclear weapons and armaments into educational programmes and birth control programmes for people in the third world that need help badly...'

'During the Falkland Islands war [we ran] on Cable News Network live broadcasts from Great Britain and from Buenos Aires, showing what the Argentinian leaders were saying to their people and what the British leaders were saying to theirs, and we showed the Argentinian mothers mourning their dead sons that came back in casks, and we showed pictures of the British ships that were sunk and pictures of the Argentinian ships which were sunk, and we showed the

mourning there and in Europe, and I tell you it's really great to see both sides of the war at the same time because, brother, it makes you want *not to be in a war*.'

Not content with that, Turner gave an equally straight-from-the-cuff opinion of news values today: 'I mean the only thing I have seen on network news about Italy is terrorists... And when I went to Rome last year... I really literally expected to be met at the airport by terrorists. But I wasn't. I was there for a week and I didn't see a single terrorist the whole time. Most of the people I saw were walking down the street with their girlfriends, and really quite nice.' The emphasis on bombs and other outrages, he thought, was giving people a false impression that 'the world is a very mean and violent place.' He was making a programme called *Nice People* 'about people that help others—and even in the United States we've found them!'

One thing that emerged very clearly from the Turner annals is that out there in the unprotected, unregulated, cold world of free enterprise, putting over quality programmes (however you define quality) is a battle to the death: 'When we started we had to fight the entire existing broadcasting structure in the United States... When you're advancing you have to take advantage of every opportunity and you cannot let go... That's what I'm doing with the other three networks. I'm not going to stop until they wave the white flag, and then I don't even know if I'll accept their surrender.'

Later Michael Grade, nephew of Lew and former London Weekend Television programme controller who now works in US network TV, said that Turner had got away with paying his company only \$50,000 for 250 hours of expensively made situation comedy. Rod Allen of LWT pointed out that Turner only made

profits by buying programmes at local rates and selling advertising at national ones, and said that his 24-hour news service had been making a loss. Ugly George, a surprisingly innocent-looking character who persuades girls to undress in front of the camera for his cable show which apparently gets the highest ratings in Manhattan, had been specially invited to stalk through the festival, a lesson to us all. People just don't know what's good for them. Four-letter words are what they are prepared to pay for, e.g. 'porn'. 'News and film are four-letter words,' Ted Turner pointed out. 'So is hope,' said Fred Friendly.

Professor Fred Friendly of Columbia University, the man who resigned as president of CBS News when the network ran a soap opera and repeats of three shows including an episode of *I Love Lucy* instead of the live Fulbright Hearings on Vietnam, was probably the only *unanimously* respected (indeed revered) figure at the festival. His first witticism, about himself and Turner ('the one in the spring time of his senility, the other in the autumn of his adolescence. I'll leave it to you to work out which is which'), echoed pleasantly through the week, and his subsequent crusading wisdom gave a kind of reassurance otherwise completely lacking from the proceedings. Friendly, who has crossed swords with them all from Senator McCarthy to President Nixon, immediately made it very plain that there are more things than are dreamt of in our philosophy, not least that to try to give the public what it really wants is to take on the biggest challenge of the lot.

In Friendly's hometown Turner's CNN1 is unavailable simply because the cable operator Westinghouse, which has gone into partnership with ABC, provides fillers including a Spanish-speaking service to block the channel space. 'You all here have a clean slate to work from,' he said. 'You can hopefully learn from our mistakes.' The lesson to be learnt from America, as I get it, is not just that access without money usually results in rubbish, but that money might conceivably be raised for better things than soap. Instead of denigrating public expectations, we should be selling the idea of programmes that are actually worth buying. The truth is that people with good experience and good ideas are kicking

their heels inside the present system as well as outside it. There is a bottleneck of talent and ability that blocks the way for more of it to get in. The public service attitude to the public is condescending, with the result that only a limited amount of genuinely worthwhile programming (which need not always be the most expensive) is allowed. More air space available to people with a different outlook could give communicators here and viewers the world over more of the kind of television they deserve. The analogy with the Renaissance need not be just a dream.

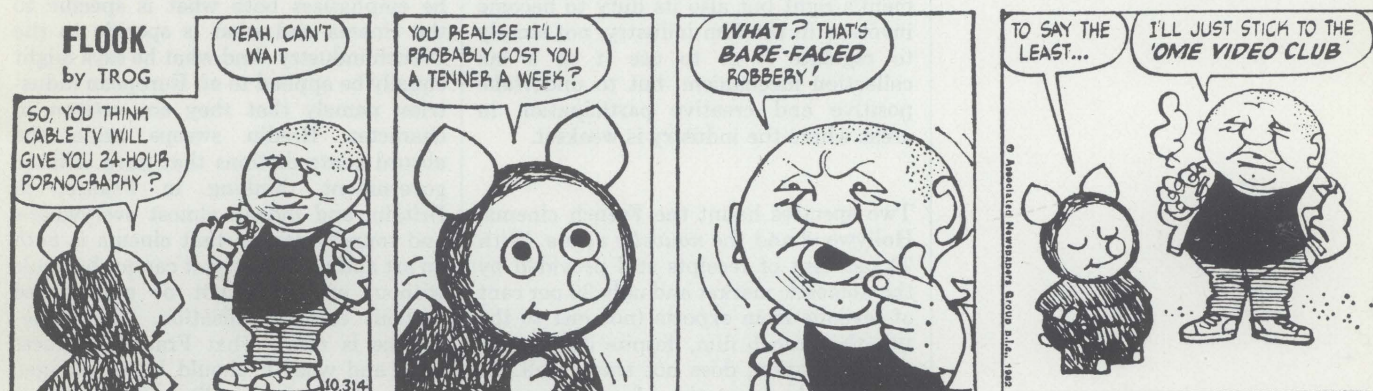
In Edinburgh a satellite dish was picking up material direct from Moscow, but the schedule of seminars was so concentrated that programmes of any kind were having a rough time. I most remember being horribly unnerved (due possibly to hunger) by the sight of a feather mop coming out of a monitor straight at me during an early evening 3D spectacular presented by TVS. I missed the sessions on French Television, Young People and Sport because they clashed with something else (familiar story), but those on Drama, Comedy, *Vérité* and Independents were more concerned with television people than television itself, and strategies of power vis-à-vis, say, Channel 4, made for parochial debate by comparison with the all-consuming passion of cable politics. The *Vérité* session came closest to confronting the potentialities of the medium (the film medium, that is). Pioneers Richard Leacock and Jean Rouch were on the platform, but so were so many other people that, as chairman Colin Young observed, the panel ran the risk of outnumbering the audience, and the complacency of some of these younger practitioners became so embarrassing that you warmed to such sardonic comment from the floor as Norman Swallow's suspicion that this was possibly the most incestuous occasion of the lot, and Chris Dunkley's assertion that television is not a visual but a verbal medium.

The biggest attendance was for the debate on the news coverage of the Falklands crisis. A crowd that included some of the most influential people in the communications business was held at bay outside the BBC studios in Queen Street because, it was

alleged later, fighting had broken out and a commissionaire had been knocked to the ground by a petite female researcher in the entrance hall. This was the TV people's chance to get their own back on the Government, and they certainly took it. 'I don't expect you to give up your struggle,' said Neville Taylor, head of information at the Ministry of Defence, his back against the wall from the beginning. 'I don't expect military commanders to give up theirs.'

The atmosphere in the hall became electric when Michael Nicholson of ITN, who was called from the floor, revealed that the Ministry had refused to share the platform with him and fellow journalist Brian Hanrahan of the BBC. Both reporters vividly described their difficulties and frustrations in the Falklands due to official unhelpfulness which Hanrahan attributed to inertia and Nicholson to arrogance. They sat down to loud, prolonged applause. Taylor lit a cigarette. Then with the consummate skill that comes of centuries of civilised debate, the pressure was eased and energies redirected into another long hard grind that made everybody late for the Granada party. An interesting thing is that no one objected to the *principle* of censorship in relation to something like the Falklands conflict. It just seemed to be a question of agreeing the rules in advance.

So it is with cable—simply a matter of getting together and working out the rules. Or is it? The Hunt report is a very British compromise. While recognising the need for flexibility in the face of circumstances virtually beyond control, it is potentially more restrictive than libertarian, and there also seem to be a number of technological options outside its terms of reference. In more ways than one this whole debate is not just about wiring. What do viewers want? Research by the National Consumer Council has indicated widespread dissatisfaction with the choice, but not necessarily the quality, of existing television programmes. Viewers would apparently welcome greatly increased choice. On the basis of the Hunt recommendations it looks as if they will pay heavily for it, particularly if the package compulsorily includes electronic locks for the protection of the immature. The scenario at the moment (mid-October) reads more like *The Trial of Lady Chatterley* than 1984. ■



THE BREDIN REPORT

JILL FORBES examines
'a brilliantly imaginative'
report on the French
film industry, which, she
suggests, 'makes the
activities of Britain's
Interim Action
Committee look puny
indeed'.

From this side of the Channel, the French film industry glitters like an Eldorado whose streets are paved with gold for producers, distributors and exhibitors alike. The figures are eloquent: in 1980, 173 million tickets were sold; 189 films went into production; 238 French films opened in Paris; the country had a total of 4,500 cinemas with more than 1.5 million seats, etc, etc. (See the annual report of the Centre National de la Cinématographie.) In all, for a population of just over 53 million, perhaps the healthiest film industry outside the United States.

But this apparently flourishing industry has recently been compared to the pram on the Odessa steps, bumping inexorably downwards under machine-gun fire. The fact is that the Ministry of Culture in France believes the rosy exterior points to a consumptive patient, and that recent trends in the French film industry are extremely disquieting. Fewer and fewer French films are being sold abroad, and the industry has still not successfully penetrated the American market; the cinema has increasingly become a middle-class form of entertainment; the industry itself is showing signs of excessive concentration and its financial basis remains weak; finally, in France as elsewhere, the new technologies are about to bring profound modifications to the cinema's economy.

For all these reasons, the new French government in 1981 appointed a 'Mission' to reflect and report on the future of the cinema, under the chairmanship of Jean-Denis Bredin, himself Vice-Chairman of the Moinot Commission on Broadcasting. Bredin's recommendations were published in November 1981, and presented by the Minister of Culture, Jack Lang, in the form of sixteen 'fiches', or synthetic proposals, in April 1982. The effect of the proposals is now beginning to be felt, and the whole operation is, in Lang's words, 'an attempt to redefine the way the economy of the French cinema works, within the context of an ambitious cultural policy.' And if the Bredin Report and Lang's 'fiches' are not especially Socialist, apart from certain aspects mentioned below, what is immediately striking about them is that they are supremely *interventionist*. Bredin, in other words, takes as automatic not just the government's right but also its duty to become involved in the film industry, not simply to regulate it or to use it as a tax collection mechanism, but to undertake positive and creative participation in areas where the industry is weakest.

Two spectres haunt the French cinema: Hollywood and the *nouvelle vague*. With 70 per cent of receipts still provided by the domestic market and only 20 per cent of revenue from exports (not just to the US), the French film, despite its prestige and reputation, does not travel well. As the French never tire of pointing out, however, 50 per cent of the American

industry's sales come from exports, and 30 per cent of all cinema entries in France are for American films. This, *mutatis mutandis*, has been the postwar situation in most European countries. But in France it has been exacerbated, though this may seem paradoxical, by the relative dynamism of the French industry: the exhibition sector has remained buoyant, French television has been inordinately greedy for the American product and, alongside its material success, Hollywood has enjoyed considerable intellectual prestige in France which, in turn, has affected patterns of film distribution.

Which brings us to the *nouvelle vague*. Truffaut's Cannes prize in 1959 inaugurated a decade of the kind of success that every producer dreams of: low-budget features that nevertheless go round the world. More pertinently, the film-makers to whom the *nouvelle vague* tag was attached at that time are still bankable, essentially for the same reasons. Truffaut's *Le Dernier Métro*, for example, was one of the biggest grossing films in France in 1980. For the civil servant wondering how best to spend his limited amount of money on the cinema, the *nouvelle vague* remains an object lesson. The argument runs something like this: give the *auteur* his head, back 'creativity' rather than the big machines, the deals and the glossy packages that are so typical of Hollywood, invest in the quirky, the youthful and the individualistic, and you've backed an industry. But here is another paradox. Much of the success of the *nouvelle vague* depended on a re-reading of Hollywood, which the young Turks of the late 1950s found so much more stimulating than the stilted good manners of postwar French cinema. In a just world the reverse should also be true! The French sometimes profess themselves astonished that although the 'auteur' theory has been a worldwide success, and has in fact been particularly attractive to American film critics, somehow intellectual influence has not been translated into dollar bills.

All this Bredin takes on board. Lashing himself firmly to the mast of the French industry, he recommends instant abandonment of the fantasy that Mr Average in Tucson, Arizona, will overnight transfer his loyalties to French film. Instead he emphasises both what is specific to the cinema and what is specific to the French industry. And what he says might equally be applied to all European industries: namely that they are *artisan* in character. Bredin sweeps aside the absurd contradictions that have vitiated government thinking in France, in Britain, and indeed almost everywhere, and roundly asserts that cinema is *both* an art and an industry, it cannot be made without art, it cannot be appreciated without commercialisation. The consequence is clear: what France produces best, and what it should be encouraged to produce, is 'quality' films in an industrial framework. This conclusion, it

should also be said, is entirely within the traditions of French capitalism which has traditionally thrived on the export of semi-luxury goods, but it is nevertheless the only reasonable posture to adopt in relation to Hollywood.

Bredin's recommendations cover three main areas—production, distribution/exhibition, and television and the new technologies. All are extremely interesting, but British film-makers who are naturally agog to discover what new funds are to be made available for production, should not forget that the proposals ought to be taken as a whole, for that is the intention with which they were conceived.

Probably the most celebrated mechanism of film finance in France is the *avance sur recettes*, instituted by Malraux and often said to have been at the root of *nouvelle vague* successes in the 1960s. The *avance sur recettes* is derived from a rolling fund, the *fonds de soutien*, made up of a levy on all cinema entries. Since its inception in 1960, the extraordinary total of 748 films have benefited to a greater or lesser degree from the *avance*, but it is not the only client of the *fonds de soutien*, its resources are not always made available, as was the original intention, to films which cannot be financed elsewhere, and in any case film production costs have escalated in the past few years.

Because Bredin is persuaded that today's avant-garde is tomorrow's family feature, he insists on supporting high-risk ventures. The sums available for *avances sur recettes* will be doubled and, from 1982 onwards, the State will provide 50 per cent of the funds by direct grant from the Treasury. This will permit a financial participation of between 25 and 35 per cent (and exceptionally 50 per cent) in films up to a ceiling of 2 million francs at 1981 prices. In addition to this, the *Commission des avances* (the committee which selects projects to fund) will be split in two in order to widen the range of clients it can cope with. Thus first and second features will be looked at by a separate committee from that which examines projects submitted by established film-makers, and anyone whose first feature is given an *avance* will automatically receive script development funding for a second. The *Commission des avances* is instructed to make 'cultural' and not 'commercial' choices and to aid the sale and distribution of films as well as their production.

Arguably Bredin has done nothing more, here, than make sure that the *avance sur recettes* functions as was the original intention with some essential pump-priming from the public purse. But the present government sees things rather differently. In Bredin's view, there is no incompatibility between the encouragement of individual creativity, with a suitable variety of funding bodies, and the creation of a public or semi-public

film production sector. Bredin insists, as a start, that public organisations such as the television companies and the Institut National de l'Audiovisuel should face up to their film production responsibilities, but he also suggests that a new umbrella body, the Institut du Développement du Cinéma (IDC), should be created to act as a central channel through which funds from many sources, and particularly from the recently nationalised banking sector, should flow. This new organisation, it is hoped, will allow the State to act in an entrepreneurial fashion in relation to film production.

The reputation of the *avance sur recettes* formula, and the immediate promise of more cash, should not be allowed to obscure the fact that it is in the realm of distribution and exhibition that Bredin really breaks new ground and confronts the problems of French, and European, cinema head on.

It is in distribution that an unhealthy level of concentration has become apparent in the French film industry over the past decade or so, added to which is a

'For M Mitterrand, the pursuit of cultural policies is more than the continuation of a tradition: it is an end in itself. It is part and parcel of the new humanism. . .'

substantial degree of vertical integration since Gaumont renewed its production activities some seven years ago. During the 1970s, cinema attendances stabilised at around 179 million (having dropped from over 400 million entries in the 1950s), but this apparent stability masks real changes in the nature of the audience and the pattern of film distribution in France. A large number of new cinemas have opened, but these have almost exclusively been sited in big towns. Moreover, throughout the 1970s, large sums of money from the *fonds de soutien* went into renovating cinemas and converting them into multicinema complexes. This was particularly true in Paris, where the cheaper second-run 'suburban' halls have now all but disappeared, with the result that almost all films are now screened at 'West End' prices, which a middle-class audience is prepared to pay. The last President, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, notoriously allowed crude commercialisation of film distribution in France. In

1974, the UGC federation was sold off to the private sector and simultaneously adopted uniform programming for the whole country. Now, with Parafrance, and Gaumont-Pathé, which is by far the biggest distribution company with 30 per cent of the market, three distributor-exhibitors control what goes on screens in Paris and the regions. The situation has got so bad that even in Paris there subsist only four independent exhibitors: Olympic, Action, 14 Juliet and St André des Arts.

Bredin wants to encourage both the distribution of 'difficult' or non-commercial films, and a greater variety of programming in general. He is particularly scathing about the concept of national programming, and maintains that decisions made in Paris, without knowledge of local conditions, have contributed to the decline of the cinema in villages and small towns. Aid from the *fonds de soutien* will be made available for extra prints and deficit guarantees for 'difficult' films. Bredin also proposes to create an *Agence de développement régional du cinéma*, under Jack Gajos, with a brief to help small exhibitors to come together in regional consortia, to make grants for modernisation and new equipment, to make prints available, and to advise on how small independent exhibitors and the local authorities might collaborate on film exhibition.

Many of these proposals should look familiar to those conversant with the regional policies of the British Film Institute. In addition, it might be felt that given France's greater surface area and more scattered population the problems posed there are even more intractable than those in Britain. Nevertheless, Bredin's suggestions do have some novel aspects. First, a determined refusal to see any conflict between the activities of independent 'commercial' exhibitors and those of the State or the local authorities. Second, a decision that programming, whether in the public or the private sector, should no longer be dictated from Paris. Here the new-style Socialist inspiration, based on decentralisation and self-management, clearly underlies Bredin's proposals.

The monopoly represented by Gaumont-Pathé is to be broken up, in the sense that the two companies will no longer be able to pursue common programming policies in the cinemas they own. Furthermore, all exhibition deals and consortia will be submitted to the prior approval of the Centre National de la Cinématographie, whose powers will be reinforced. No one company or consortium will be allowed to dominate the regional or national chains ('circuits'), and a 'mediator', a kind of monopolies ombudsman, will be appointed to oversee the negotiation of agreements, and to protect the rights of independent distributors and exhibitors. In France as in Britain the monopolies commission has



always looked doubtfully on the legality of such questions as barring agreements, without necessarily being able to prevent them occurring. The issue was last raised in France at the time of the so-called Cometti Affair in 1979, when an independent was refused a print of a film by one of the big distributors, but the court decision at the time was extremely ambiguous. Now, the French government has seized the bull by the horns and stated quite unequivocally that practices such as the bar amount to unfair competition and act as a hindrance to the expression of regional particularisms and artistic endeavour.

If Bredin's recommendations on distribution and exhibition are courageous, its proposals as to the future relationship between television and the cinema are no more than commonsensical. But they are also logical and coherent and benefit from being made at a time when the audiovisual sector, *le marché de l'image*, is being revamped in its entirety. In fact the special report on the new technologies (*Le Cinéma et les Nouvelles Techniques de l'Audio-visuel* by Nicolas Seydoux) comes up with some startling figures. For example, in 1978 French television screened a total of 2,120 hours of fictional material, of which 448 hours were made up of foreign features and 391 hours of French features, and of those 218 hours were repeats and 173 were premieres. This means that French television, as it is at present constituted, needs on average 200 new hours per annum of feature film material, whereas current production levels only supply about 60 films, or approximately 100 hours' worth of suitable family feature material. In other words, the film industry is not succeeding in filling television's gaping maw, and will be even less capable of doing so now the quota of French films has risen from 50 to 60 per cent.

Bredin therefore makes a series of concrete proposals for the conservation of the film heritage, currently estimated at about 6,000 sound features and 1,200 silent features, and for making this heritage more widely available subject to satisfactory payments to copyright holders. The latter, moreover, they suggest might be financed by means of a levy on blank video tapes and on video cassette recorders. They wish French films, new and old, to be marketed more aggressively abroad, and funds to be made available towards that end. The Moinot Commission recommended that the purchase of film rights by television should make a substantial contribution to a film's production costs; Bredin now adds that television should continue to co-produce films for the cinema, that it should be obliged to produce and screen a certain number of 'minority' films, but that a television company should never be allowed to have more than a minority financial interest in a film: this in an attempt to impede what might be called the Low Grade effect.

Finally, the Commission recognises

that the new European satellites will from 1985-6 onwards pose the biggest challenge yet to French feature films' share of the European market. As far as the Franco-German satellite is concerned, they are confident that a satisfactory agreement will be reached involving, they hope, the mutual transmission of subtitled features. What most preoccupies them, however, is the Luxembourg channel, and here they can do little more than pray that a satisfactory arrangement will be negotiated. However, the Minister of Communications recently speculated that French television will shortly get not just a fourth but a fifth channel, and that the fifth channel, relayed by satellite, would be of a kind able to compete with RTL's presumed commercialism. But what is interesting is the peculiarity of the French market in this respect. On the one hand, there is a shortage of 'software'; but on the other hand, opinion polls reveal that however insatiable the television audience for feature films may be, the French prefer to use television to review films they have already seen in the cinema, and to the extent that television in France has failed to impose its specificity on the viewers, to that extent the future looks good for the film industry.

France may have a left-wing government, but this does not mean that the Bredin report can be dismissed as a wild Socialist fantasy. What immediately strikes the reader about Jack Lang's *fiches* is that they are both pragmatic and imaginative, and that they marry with ease a number of economic proposals, which are perhaps 'Socialist' but which are certainly not doctrinaire, with practical suggestions for supporting the film industry, and that these proposals are logical. This is why Bredin offers a model rescue operation for just about any national film industry outside Hollywood, and certainly for ours in Britain.

However, if it is not particularly Socialist, there is a way in which Bredin is 'Mitterrandiste'. In the first place, the links between the President and the film industry have not escaped both sympathetic and unsympathetic observers. Mme Mitterrand's sister, Christine Gouze-Rénal, is a film producer and her husband, Roger Hanin, is an actor and film producer. Their activities may be familiar to audiences in this country through Chabrol's films, with which they have often been associated. Meanwhile, Frédéric Mitterrand, one of the President's nephews, runs the independent Olympic distribution company mentioned above. These connections may go some way towards explaining why the film industry benefited from a separate report from broadcasting, since it might in some respects have seemed more sensible to include film in the Moinot Commission's brief.

Mitterrand's connections with the cinema are significant in other ways too.

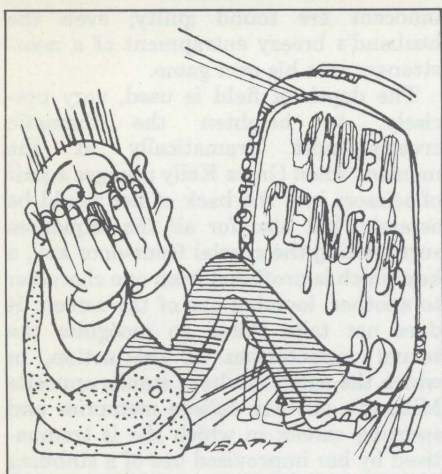
Foreigners tend to treat the French interest in cultural politics as slightly comic. Every President, like de Gaulle, needs a Malraux by his side and Mitterrand is no exception. Jack Lang is a personal friend, and the Ministry of Culture's budget was doubled in his first year of office. The cinema is an indisputable area of French cultural success, and Lang wanted to be associated with its preservation. But for Mitterrand, the pursuit of cultural policies is more than the continuation of a tradition: it is an end in itself. It is part and parcel of the new humanism, the anti-technocratic movement which the 1981 elections ushered in.

Mitterrand earned his living as a writer, and it is the individual creative effort which the new French Socialism seeks to foster and protect, rather than the 'efficiency' and 'productivity' so ruthlessly pursued by the preceding government. It is perhaps no accident that the director Bertrand Tavernier chaired the Bredin sub-committee on production, for viewers of his recent film, *Des Enfants Gâtés*, will recognise in it the authentic voice of the new socialism. In it, the inhabitants of a block of jerry-built flats form a tenants' association to combat the exploitative activities of big business and, in so doing, discover new outlets for their creativity. This is a Socialism which opposes the individual to the collective, whether the collective is a multi-national corporation or a State monopoly.

But however well the Bredin report conforms to the new spirit of Socialism, it is by no means an exercise in charity. The French have called the new audiovisual market the sale of the century and they intend to retain a proportion of it. This, above all, is the reason why it seems right to intervene in the market, and why other countries will be led to follow the French example, or else find themselves squeezed out by the American majors. Bredin is full of lessons for Britain, beyond the elementary lesson that interventionism pays off. In its decision to back what is unusual and specific in the French film industry, in rejecting the Hollywood model both in creative and in marketing terms, in refusing to become impaled on the horns of the art vs industry dilemma, and in insisting, again and again, that a film remains a piece of celluloid in a can until it is screened, that a policy for production is nonsensical without a policy for distribution, Bredin makes the activities of the Interim Action Committee on the Film Industry look puny indeed. No one knows how much Bredin's proposals will really cost, and no one knows whether all of them will work. But it is a start, and a brilliantly imaginative one at that. ■

Thanks are due to the Service de documentation, Institut National de l'Audiovisuel. The Bredin Report is now available in an English translation from the British Film Institute (On the Future of the French Cinema, BFI, £2.50).

DOUBLE TAKES



Censorship

The last edition of this column devoted some space to two events: the decision to prosecute the so-called 'video nasties' (*Driller Killer*, *I Spit on Your Grave*, *SS Experiment Camp*) under the Obscene Publications Act; and the introduction of a British Board of Film Censors' code for videotapes. It seemed mildly disturbing that video should have to run the same gauntlet as film in the 70s—prosecution for material that might be obscene on the one hand, censor cuts for productions that seemed simply too outrageous on the other.

But the passing of the Cinematograph Amendment Act, which came into being on 13 October 1982 (with a three-month period for cinemas to comply), has spawned a disturbing and rather complicated horror story of its own. The change in the law was intended chiefly to bring sex clubs in Soho and elsewhere back under control, by updating previous Acts (1909, 1952). But in the process it seems that the 1982 Act will hurt the independent cinemas and distributors; lead to some self-censorship on their part; and, most contentious of all, give the BBFC a semi-statutory position. On the face of it the law is simple: it has been extended to cover virtually all moving pictures, including video. All places where such 'cinematographic' exhibitions take place must apply to the local authority for a fire and safety licence (cost £82), whether or not they are 'clubs', and unless they are certified as non-profit organisations, it becomes a condition of their licence that they only show titles which have been passed by the BBFC.

It clearly makes sense to bring video and celluloid law together under one heading and to enforce safety rules. But to make the non-statutory BBFC a pillar of the licensing system is a dangerous backward step. The wrong-headedness of the decision is partly disguised by the fact that the BBFC is introducing a new certification system in tandem with the new law. The old 'U' certificate remains; above it there is a 'PG' (parental guidance) category; then over-15 only, and

over-18 only. But the real change comes with a new 'club' category in which the Board will pass films for 'restricted distribution' to club venues (closed automatically to the under-18s). This category will include much of the material currently shown in porn cinemas, as well as some controversial art-house titles such as *Ai No Corrida* (*In the Realm of the Senses*). It covers explicit 'hardcore' sexual images including erect male nudity and penetration. There seems to be no problem. Cinemas wishing to show such material will obtain their licence and apply to operate as restricted distribution clubs. And yet, and yet...

During the last few years many independent cinemas went over to membership systems, partly to avoid paying the Eady Levy on their box-office, which could make all the difference between profit and a substantial loss for a small cinema. Others went over to club status in order to minimise the legal risks in showing films like *Ai No Corrida*, *Salò* and *Maitresse*. But one general consequence was that independent distributors often no longer submitted films for certification. On a quick straw poll it seems that there are now several hundred titles in distribution (of which scores are features) that have no certificate and could not be shown in art houses without technically putting their licences at risk (and the cost of certifying this backlog would be enormous). The censor, James Ferman, replies that the vast majority of these outlets would be exempt because they would fall into the non-commercial category. But...

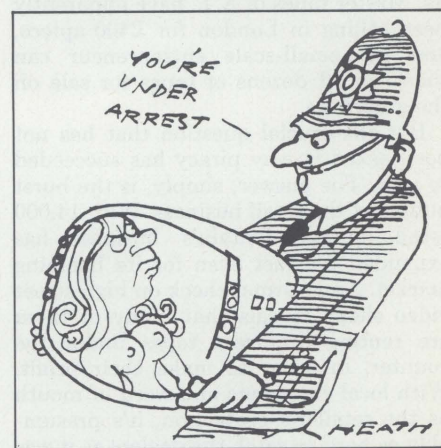
The definition of 'commercial' is not perfectly clear. Many regional film theatres, for example, though not run for profit in the long term, do charge admission and advertise—two crucial criteria. As Ferman points out, 'every bona fide' film club will be able to apply to the commissioners of Customs and Excise for a certificate proving that they are not run for gain, and can so gain exemption. But this will not cover truly independent cinemas such as London's Electric or Scala, whose services to British film culture over the past decade have been immense. And...

As a matter of principle, the introduction of further controls on what is shown in the cinema is unwelcome. As the censor agrees, we are already protected by obscenity law, labour law, and the Protection of Children Act. The need for fire and safety licences is obvious. But further regulation of what we see is not. And it is clear that there will be some regulation. Though *Ai No Corrida* will fall happily within the new 'restricted distribution' category, Ferman feels that a film like *Taxi zum Klo* would probably have to be cut (of its 'golden shower' sequence) in order to comply. Lastly, as always, there is the harsh test of enforceability. At the time of going to press, one acquaintance connected with the Soho trade was suggesting possible ways of sidestepping the Act—for example by registering porn cinemas as non-profit

entities in themselves, but making them subsidiary to parent property companies which would charge massive leases and 'agenting' fees.

At the time of its introduction, the new Act had already provoked mild panic in the independent sector. James Ferman himself regretted that 'it had all happened a bit quickly'. One cinema owner had received a letter from the Greater London Council only two days before the Act came into force, asking if he wanted to apply for a licence. Several weeks later, he still had not received the necessary forms, and in the welter of confusion surrounding the new law had cancelled all his bookings of non-certificated films (no hot numbers, either, but a selection of jazz movies from the TCB catalogue).

The gap between an advisory board of censorship and the statutory force of the law on obscenity has always been an awkward one, and the censor obviously hopes that the new system will close it almost completely—that films which fall beyond the new 'restricted distribution' category will also automatically be films that fall foul of the law. But it seems unlikely. The censor's office is preparing extensive case-law studies to find the fine line where courts start convicting for obscenity. But it's predictable that some local authorities (and some juries) will be laxer and others more strict than the BBFC, so that the value of the censor's office itself will again come into question. We may even have to start by defending, once more, the integrity of such films as *Taxi zum Klo*. But the worst aspect of all this is that the long argument which led to the establishment of the Williams Committee may have to begin again. Because this new Act and its connection with the BBFC offers us the form, but not the substance, of a liberal reform.



Pirates

Last autumn the film business announced a major season of video pirate hunting. United International Pictures were co-ordinating the British operation. Steven Spielberg was giving it his moral and financial support. And in a series of raids, the police seized hundreds of tapes, as well as masters and equipment for

DOUBLE

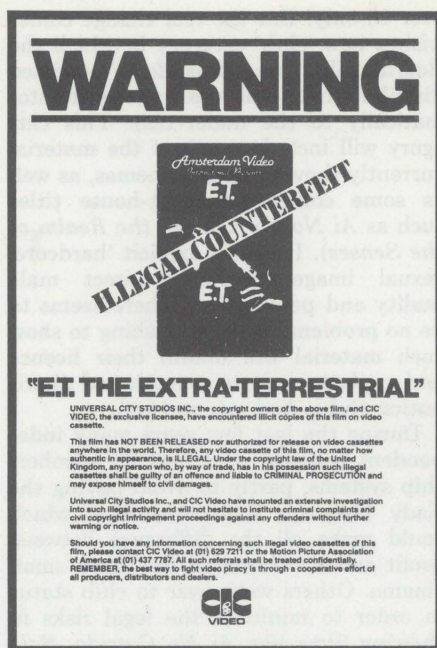
copying. The tape distributors introduced special 'legitimate' wrapping. Merely being in possession of a pirate tape became an offence. But is the end of piracy in sight?

A friend recently sent me the photocopied catalogue of a pirate distributor/swap club, listing well over a hundred titles with outline descriptions: 'Family Feature', 'Adult Feature', 'Horror', and even (gasp) 'Horror (not for the squeamish)'. The titles spanned a wide but predictable range, in which safe favourites like *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Watership Down* rubbed shoulders with the 'nasties', including Wes Craven's intellectually respectable but stomach-churning *Last House on the Left*. Several of the horror titles were simply unknown—outlaw tapes from the Italian gore mill, perhaps, drifting through media space in search of a home. Certainly, the prosecution of the 'nasties' and the introduction of censor's guidelines did not seem to have perturbed this particular outlet. Even more interesting, though, was that only perhaps a fifth of the titles fell into the shock shlock category, which explains the anxiety of the majors with their libraries of mainstream entertainment; it also suggests how unbalanced the agitation over *Driller Killer* has become.

If the moral and emotional threat of illicit video is mostly imaginary, the financial damage is real. Trade sources think that anything up to 70 per cent of the retail business is now occupied by illegitimate tapes. Which makes one wonder how any police response can be effective. The individual copyright thief, taping off TV or swapping tapes for a fee, will never be punished with really deterrent severity. And for the businessman, the risks are small compared to the profits. Master tapes of *E.T.* have apparently been selling in London for £400 apiece, and the small-scale entrepreneur can then run off dozens of tapes for sale on the grapevine.

But the crucial question that has not been asked is why piracy has succeeded so well. The answer, simply, is the burst bubble of the retail business. With 14,000 retail outlets, Britain's business has expanded too fast even for its booming market. An informal check on high street video shops reveals that many of them are renting duplicate tapes under the counter, in order to make their profit. With local customers and word of mouth as the retailer's protection, it's presumably as hard to catch the dealers as it was to stop the black market sale of butter and nylons in the war. And piracy has become a business *within* the business. An acquaintance who works in film distribution recently asked how he could come by a tape of *E.T.* 'I know I shouldn't ask,' he said, 'but everybody is talking about it.'

The only long term solution is to cripple the demand. *E.T.* will be shown in Britain six months after its US release and a significant proportion of its audience will by then have seen the



A warning to pirates.

film illegally (but in comfort, at home, and with a thrill). One answer would have been a simultaneous (or almost simultaneous) British release. And the response to duplicated tapes should be to guarantee a consistently high quality on legitimately rented tapes (which often isn't the case). Sending the law after the pirates may make them more cautious. But in the land of 2 million home video recorders, it is hardly going to stop the demand.

Hitchcock

'What else has he made?' It's not the question you'd expect to hear about Hitchcock in a left-bank Paris cinema queue. But that's what one heard last autumn while waiting to see *Le Crime était Presque Parfait* (*Dial M for Murder*) in its original 3D version at the Studio Action, as never before shown in Europe. *Dial M* was adapted from a successful play and Hitchcock claims to have deliberately heightened the theatricality of his 3D production by minimising exterior shots and by placing the camera in a pit on the set, which has the effect of giving you a stalls-eye view of the action for much of the time.

Given 3D's track record and Hitchcock's own dismissive comment to Truffaut ('there isn't much we can say about that one, is there?'), one's expectations were modest. But the use of the process is intriguing. *Dial M* is, of course, the story of an adulterous London wife (Grace Kelly) whose indolent husband (Ray Milland) plans to kill her; she is then convicted of murder when she defends herself against his hired killer. All this is theatrical and talky—a real one-set melodrama. But the themes are pure Hitchcock: marriage harbouring murder; the hopeless logic by which the

innocent are found guilty; even the husband's breezy entrapment of a near-stranger into his own game.

The depth of field is used, very precisely, to heighten the thematic cruelty—most dramatically at the moment when Grace Kelly plunges a pair of scissors into the back of her would-be assassin, but also for all the sequences surrounding the crucial front-door key, a key which is proffered from one character to another, looming out of the screen. It does not take Freud to recognise the sexual connotations of the action, in which the wife's adultery stands opposite Milland's old boy college memories and sporting career; in which she is traumatised by her improvised use of a stabbing weapon and he by the loss of his key to their flat. The 3D, far from being superfluous, highlights exactly those key (!) elements of penetration and distance. Fascinating.

But only some time after the screening did it dawn that *Dial M for Murder* is really the first in the series of Hitchcock's psycho-sexual terror stories which culminate in *Psycho*. And that four out of the six films which followed it, including *Rear Window* and *Vertigo*, are somehow missing.

Missing in a real sense, because they cannot be seen. Amid all the interest in Hitchcock's life since his death, no one has paid much attention to the absent Hitchcocks. Several titles have been in and out of circulation in more or less the ordinary way—*Spellbound*, *Rebecca* and *The Paradine Case*, produced by David Selznick, as well as *Notorious*, all came back into British distribution a couple of years ago after a distributor bought the rights on them from ABC TV. But *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956), *Rope* (1948), *Rear Window* (1954), *Vertigo* (1958) and *The Trouble with Harry* (1955) have not been available in Britain or anywhere else, for TV or cinema release, for nine years. (The original *Man Who Knew Too Much* [1934] is available in America, even on cassette, but not in Britain.) Prints, of course, exist in archives and private collections. But no one has the right to show them.

Two cases are quite distinct: *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934) and *Rope* were available in the 70s until the literary rights (to the original play or story) reverted to Lord Bernstein, the head of Granada. Subsequently, his company, Transatlantic Pictures, sold the rights on *Rope*, which he co-produced, back to the Hitchcock estate. But the four films of the 50s remain a puzzle. The rights reverted to Hitchcock himself a decade ago and they were never made available again. One rumour had it that the package was withheld because the director disliked *The Trouble with Harry*. Another that the titles were in dispute with Universal, for whom Hitchcock was not able to complete a three-picture deal. Even that the literary rights on *Rear Window* were in litigation. But it seems most likely that the phobic Hitchcock saw them as a nest egg, a financial

security to which he clung despite his immense wealth. Certainly, it was impossible even to obtain clips from some of the titles—James Stewart himself apparently applied to show *Vertigo* in a retrospective of his work and was refused. So was the National Film Theatre when it held a Hitchcock retrospective. At one point TV companies were offering several million dollars for the British TV rights.

On the telephone from California, Hitchcock's long-standing agent, Herman Citron, would only confirm that 'some years ago Mr Hitchcock decided to give these films a rest' and that 'we hope to make a deal with a major distributing company for their re-release when the tax affairs of the estate have been sorted out.' Asked how long that might be, he suggested 'the near future'. Asked how much the rights would be worth, he replied: 'We haven't even begun to think of the money.' Donald Spoto, whose book on Hitchcock's life is due out in the spring, says that the last time the films were seen legally was on American TV in 1973 (although *Rear Window* has been screened commercially in Berlin from time to time); and that he felt sure their withdrawal was 'strictly a financial decision' on the director's part, but 'a great pity'. Eventually, with the Hitchcock estate now in the hands of his daughter Patricia, one assumes that the films will return. One awaits 'the near future'.

Four

Predictably, after 18 months' euphoria at the prospect of Channel 4, the backbiting has begun in earnest, and more will follow—so many of the projects 'under consideration' are going to fall through that there will be no shortage of bitter and bitchy bad luck stories.

Even so, the image of the new network

has remained cramped and curiously ambiguous—as illustrated in the most popular Channel 4 joke going the rounds during the launch period. Barney Platts-Mills' *Hero*, shot in Scotland and based on the legendary Finn MacCool, had apparently reached the final print stage, and the commissioning editor from 4 duly settled down to watch the prestigious 'Film on Four'. After a few minutes he rose to ask the projectionist why he couldn't understand the soundtrack, only to be told that no one could—the dialogue was in Gaelic. Apocryphal, doubtless, but illuminating. Told within the BBC, the joke mocks the Channel for filming in anything other than BBC English. But told by independent filmmakers, it mocks the Channel for a sham interest in alternative culture. A case, it might seem, of the devil and the deep blue sea.

But there have been real problems. Overspending in the early days means that the channel now issues promises rather than commissions. Independent film-makers point out the rather conventional absurdity of scheduling an alternative cinema slot at 11 p.m. on Mondays, where it can hardly catch the casual viewer. The question of theatrical exhibition for the 'Film on Four' projects has become a tangle of conflicting interests and—worse—varying contracts. And the apparent lack of a centralised sales arm will become a real headache, especially for the independent non-ITCA contributors. For reasons of publicity as well as money, the channel must be able to sell its products abroad.

For the moment, it seems 4 is still caught between the habits of radical chic and the need to work within the establishment. It is an understandable dichotomy. But if it wants to retain its original credibility, Channel 4 must resolve those practical problems and begin emitting less ambiguous signals of cultural goodwill than it has done so far.



Richard Attenborough and Ben Kingsley at No 10.

Gandhi

Like Menus of the Day, Hollywood tends to have Flavours of the Year. In 1981 it was *Heaven's Gate*, overbudgeting, and the shifts of film corporations (United Artists coalesced with MGM; Columbia went to Coca-Cola). Thankfully, the aroma of 1982 has been more upbeat, a tale of multi-media interests, satellite futures and forward thinking. But the switch-round has created some strange anomalies. Michael Cimino is still the Richard Nixon of the business, while Warren Beatty has become its Jimmy Carter—despite the enormous cost of *Reds* and its poor returns, his integrity and 'artistic vision' remain untarnished.

The real surprise is that the last year should have seen not one but two whale-sized historical epics. Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi*, seventeen years in the thinking and \$20 million in the making, is the kind of project whose imperial ambitions are only matched by its impeccably liberal politics. The elevation of Gandhi to movie sainthood has much the same paradoxical effect as the celebration of nonconformity in *Reds*. John Reed and Louise Bryant were remarkable, Beatty tells us, simply because they took American values (freedom of speech, resistance to tyranny, sexual liberalism) to their fullest possible extent. In much the same way, Gandhi is a model of English manners (fair, obsessively retiring, legal, stubborn) taken to extremes. Despite the unhappy row over who should play the man, and despite its admirable intentions, Attenborough's film is, finally, a celebration of a product of the Empire.

All of which comes into amusingly ironic focus when you look at Goldcrest, its buoyant production company. Funded by Pearson Longman, the publishers, Goldcrest's board of directors now includes Richard Attenborough, David Puttnam (*Chariots of Fire*) and Harold Evans (formerly of *The Times*). Without exaggerating, you might say that we're looking at a roll-call of latter-day Knights of the British Empire. Just the kind of class, in fact, that goes down so well in Hollywood...



All Gaelic: Barney Platts-Mills' *'Hero'*.

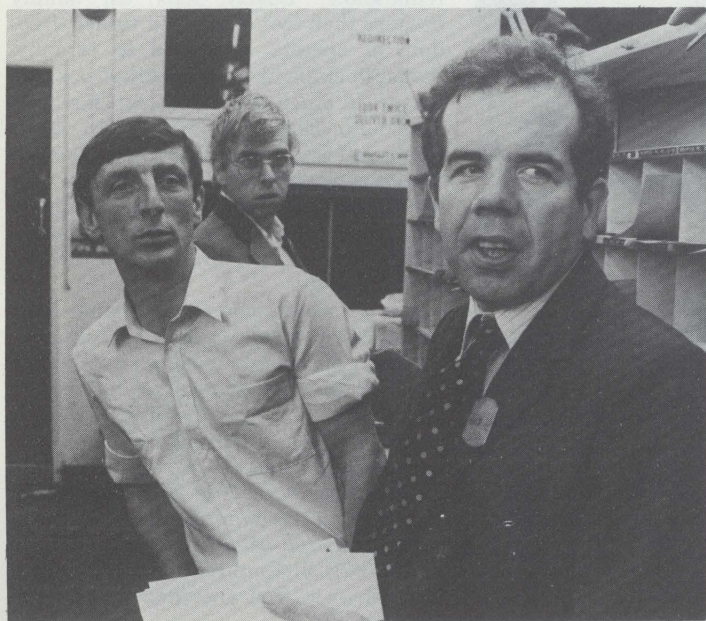
JOHN RUSSELL TAYLOR

Giggling beneath the waves

the uncanny world of Mike Leigh



'Nuts in May': Alison Steadman and (right) Mike Leigh.



'Home Sweet Home': Eric Richard, Timothy Spall, Tim Barker.



'Abigail's Party': Tim Stern, Alison Steadman.

It is curious that Mike Leigh, just about the most complete and consistent film creator we have, claims to be the least. An auteur without, to all appearances, being an author, he has disappeared during the decade since *Bleak Moments* into the virtual anonymity of BBC Television. True, gigantic audiences may have seen his most successful television work, but few of them seem actually to read the credits to the end or notice the last, 'Devised and Directed by Mike Leigh', let alone wonder what exactly it means. It is no doubt significant that when BBC2 recently got round to a week-long Mike Leigh festival, it was only after he had achieved a second reputation elsewhere, from the success in the theatre of his plays *Abigail's Party* and more especially *Goose Pimples*, which moved in from the Fringe to the West End and won various awards.

Still, that seems to be the way he wants it. Despite the instant recognisability of his world, the unmistakable style of the dialogue in his films and plays, he stoutly denies any but the ultimate responsibility. He devises the basic situations, and puts the end result on film or stage, but in between he just supervises a group improvisation, leaving the actors to create their characters and dialogue. No doubt this accurately mirrors the outward appearance of the process. In the documentary *Mike Leigh Making Plays*, which prefaced the season, we saw some of it happening, through a specially staged improvisation about two actors, one of them very conservative and traditionally trained, trying to work with an advanced but muddle-headed director. What we were shown was mainly the earlier stages: the finding of names, the defining of backgrounds, the careful manoeuvring of the group on to a collision course. The later stage—how, exactly, this body of material would be shaped into a film or play—was passed rather hurriedly over, though we did get a brief

glimpse of Mike Leigh saying briskly, if not brusquely: no, he did not think she would say this, she would say that.

And the mystery remained intact. Necessarily, no doubt, since in all probability no one concerned could say afterwards exactly how this line or that turn of events came about. One does get the feeling, however, that part of Leigh's skill with actors is to ask the right leading questions and get them somehow to come to the conclusions he has always wanted them to. He more or less admits this with, for example, the vital turn in the intrigue of his masterpiece, *Grown-Ups* (1980). The two adjacent households in suburban Canterbury, one in private housing of precarious refinement, the other in council housing for the (perhaps) upwardly mobile, stubbornly kept themselves to themselves throughout the preparatory stages and the actual shooting. Leigh knew that they had somehow to come together in the same house for the climax, but how to do it without pushing the actors to falsify? Finally, when he was getting desperate, Brenda Blethyn, who was playing the unwanted, semi-idiot sister of the younger family, very hesitantly put to him the idea that when she was shut out of one house she might, mightn't she, run into the house next door.

If such anecdotes give the impression that Leigh works by a combination of ventriloquism and telepathy, that is probably not far from the mark. He knows what must happen, and how the characters are going to interact in order to make it happen, but life is kept in the process by letting the actors find out for themselves. There is no doubt, however, who is ultimately in the driving seat. And distinctions are clearly to be made between the way he works for the stage and the way he works for film. Six of the seven full-length television shows he has done, as well as five 5-minute pieces made in 1973 (that leaves out of account

only two half-hour tapes subsequently wiped and a schools broadcast) are very definitely films. *Abigail's Party* is the odd one out, being clearly a taped version of the pre-existing stage production. And the pacing is quite different: though the films sometimes have long, sustained sequences in them, the rhythm is created cinematically, by the way sequences and individual shots are edited together, rather than by recording something which has its own internal rhythms already set. When you have a long-held static shot, as in the beginning of the awful dinner party in *Who's Who* (1979), observed from a cool distance as the two girls and three young men change places and change again, the framing and the exact length of the shot create an effect which the same action would never have on stage.

If Leigh is chary of taking an unequivocal writing credit, this may have something to do with an apprehended danger that he would be considered exclusively as a writer. Even as things are, the temptation is strong. It is easy, for instance, to build up a philosophy of life, a view of social dynamics, which develop from piece to piece. Certainly there are clear points of consistency in the view the films and plays put forward of married life, of the relations between the sexes, of relations between the classes. Leigh's work—and so, for the sake of argument, let us say Leigh himself—seems to be saying that women are more socially and sexually dynamic, and more acquisitive, than their menfolk. This may be a matter of class and/or generation. The first of the television films, *Hard Labour* (1973), hints at both possibilities: in the older working-class couple the husband is domineering, orders his wife about as a matter of course, and makes sexual demands to which she wearily yields. But from what we see of the slightly higher classes—the Jewish couple the older woman cleans for, the children climbing into middle-class respectability—the roles are instantly reversed: the wives whip in unwilling husbands, refine them, and drive them onwards and upwards. They also complain, as we elsewhere discover, that the men are not interested in sex, and have to be forced to satisfy them.

Much of Leigh's drama depends on the nicest of social gradations. This is presumably why he is so often pegged as a satirist—though he might reasonably reply that he satirises nothing and no one, but shows things the way they are. The comparison with Ayckbourn, frequently made of his stage work, is really beside the point, in that Ayckbourn does not seem to be interested in the workings of the class system in England at all: his characters belong to the same suburban middle-class, and such slight differences in social status as may exist among them, which would be Leigh's meat and drink, are carefully smoothed over or ignored. No one is going to mistake Ayckbourn for a satirist; if anything he is an apologist. Leigh, on the other hand, is clearly



'Grown Ups': Lindsay Duncan, Sam Kelly, Philip Davis, Lesley Manville.

critical of his characters; critical, probably, of the whole human race.

Yet there is compassion. Leigh seems to find even his most generally awful characters, like the destructive hostess Beverley in *Abigail's Party*, sad as well as dreadful. Though we do not necessarily approve of where Leigh's characters are driven, at least we always understand what drives them, and their panic fury when someone seems likely to get in the way. Indeed, finally Leigh seems to feel that everybody is a bit sad, and everybody a bit funny: the only character in the whole oeuvre without a redeeming feature is probably the old man in *Hard Labour*, which is anyway the most schematic of them all—perhaps one is not wrong to suspect here some influence from the producer, Tony Garnett, since in many respects it resembles his other work almost as much as it does Leigh's.

To explain just how and why the films work as films, as apart from the strength of their human materials, it is necessary to look further afield for comparison: to the Czech films of Milos Forman, or to the collected works of Ermanno Olmi. As with these films, Leigh's are built up of innumerable tiny little notations of the ordinary, and seem to aim first and foremost at the unfashionable target of catching the flavour of life as it is rather than as the movies usually depict it. Of course, as we well know, that takes a great deal of art and conscious control. It can be particularly jarring when a character in a Leigh film is allowed to slip noticeably towards caricature: one worries about whether the walk assumed by the undertaker's assistant in *The Kiss of Death* (1977) is not just a mite too shambling to be believable, or whether the last social worker to call on the divorced postman in *Home Sweet Home* (1982) is not—though one knows the over-indoctrinated type perfectly well—allowed to turn his long final speech into just that, a *tour de force* which destructively draws attention to itself.

On the other hand, one should not give the impression that Leigh's films are all deliberately flat and played down in the best neo-realist tradition. His characters have lived, palpably, beyond the confines of the particular context in which we see them. In *Who's Who* the hapless Miss Hunt, who has wandered into what must seem to her a madhouse in search of a kitten after being let down by Harrods, is a character who is completely created with few words, mainly by her reactions and non-reactions to what is going on around her. One knows exactly who she is and where she comes from. The character of the visiting husband Tony in *Abigail's Party* is a more spectacular example: hardly saying more than 'yes', 'no' and 'ta', he yet makes us aware of a miserable three years' married history with the plain, unquenchable Angie through an infinite variation on tones of resignation, suppressed anger and sheer grinding boredom.

It is in areas like this that Leigh comes

closest to Olmi, whose most singular skill has always been to create a believable range of lives around and scarcely impinging on those of his central characters: the waiter who is irritable not because of the customer he is being short with, but because of something we can only guess at which just happened in the kitchen. Another respect in which there seems to be a clear link between Leigh and Olmi is in their ability to summon up intense and terrible climaxes out of little or nothing. Again, because of its stage reputation, *Abigail's Party* provides the best-known example, where as a result of a succession of small disagreements (about what records should be played, for instance), Beverley's husband Laurence finally has his much-threatened heart attack and dies there in the middle of the floor. But in many more instances, Leigh's art is quite importantly the art of knowing how far one can go too far.

Even when something physically excessive does not happen (for after all, people do from time to time just up and die), there is a lot of Hedda Gabler's 'People don't do things like that' about Leigh's films. People do not, we suppose, usually bring their bubbling resentments to the boil as they do in *Home Sweet Home*, where the scene which begins when the divorced postman is surprised kissing the wife of one of his colleagues in the kitchen by the wife of the other, with whom he has been having an affair, erupts into the street to include both husbands and various interested onlookers. Still less do they let things get to the state at the climax of *Grown Ups*, when the unwanted sister is finally locked out of the house, runs into the neighbouring teacher's, and has to be extracted by an all-out, all-inclusive scrimmage on the stairs. Or do they? Leigh's incidental message is that such things happen more often than we think; that the English are not, after all, so prim and stiff-upper-lipped.

But Leigh's probing goes farther. If he is going to have a love scene, or a sex scene, or an attempt at either, he wants to show it really the way it would be. How would the daft undertaker's assistant in *The Kiss of Death* actually go about kissing the girl who, oddly, makes a dead set at him? Very incompetently, we may be sure, even if specifically invited to do so—and the sustained scene between the two, full of giggles, uncertainties and chances missed, is one of the most astonishingly, rivetingly believable that even Leigh has managed. We feel—and surely we are meant to feel—like voyeurs. Elsewhere in the same film, the total inability of the more sensible boy to get his Betty-Boop girlfriend even to the point where she might be called on to say no is part of a history which anyone who has ever been a shy teenager (and who has not?) will certainly recognise, even though one cannot recall it being put so precisely on screen before.

Most of Leigh's films are constructed antiphonally: there is seldom a single, consistent line of development, and we

never quite know who are the principal characters, let alone decide on who might be heroes and who villains. *Who's Who* is one of the most obviously cunning pieces of construction, often approaching a sort of mosaic technique in which the situations of three groups of characters are played against each other in a way which, one realises only long after the event, makes nonsense of any conventional time scheme, switching forward and back at random, but with divine inevitability. In one part of the film the two boorish young upper class men who share a flat are preparing and staging an unfortunate dinner party which subtly sours relations all round. In another part the ineffably snobbish Alan, who works in the same office and whose hobby is writing to celebrities in hope of an answer or even a refusal on paper with the right heading, gets through an evening with his cat-breeding wife and a disgruntled photographer who is trapped into examining his collection for hours on end. And elsewhere a lord with money troubles is talking them out with a senior member of the firm of stockbrokers they all work for.

All these elements are held in balance with a conjuror's skill as each section moves casually but inevitably towards its climax/anticlimax. Along the way there are some of Leigh's most ingenious framing devices, like the departures from the dinner party, with everyone revolving drunk and decapitated while the camera holds on the still centre, the worn-out cook who has created the whole thing and seen his plans for a gracious, sophisticated evening subtly eroded as the occasion wore itself down. Even this is not, any more than the previously mentioned shot of the settling at table, obtrusive. Leigh's forte is to make everything look so casual and accidental that only on re-seeing it do you observe the precise calculation, that it is no accident the camera just happens to be in absolutely the right place at the right time.

This seamless quality makes the best of Leigh's work remarkably difficult to discuss sensibly. It is easier with the looser, more defined comic films like *Nuts in May* (1976), in which a wilfully trendy couple go camping in Devon and receive a few hard knocks to their human tolerance and ecological concern. They could easily be total figures of fun, as they sing their silly pseudo-folksongs and tramp the uplands in mountaineering boots, but they are not. Even here the crisis, with the peaceable Keith finding himself in the middle of a literal fight over an open fire in the camping site and then bursting into tears at his own unguarded will to win, executes with unshakeable confidence one of Leigh's dizzying and exhilarating right-turns out of broad comedy into something much more disturbing and unpredictable. All the same, it remains a lightweight, easy to take apart and find out what makes it tick, largely because what ticks is an alarm clock rather than a time bomb.

To get Leigh into proper proportion it



is useful to look back to *Bleak Moments*, his first and up to now his only film for the cinema (not that, technically, that makes any notable difference). The procedures are, naturally enough in a first film, more consciously elaborated, or at least elaborated in such a way that we are more conscious of them. The framing shots of drab suburban scenes are used with a formality which sometimes suggests Ozu, and the alternation of very brief scenes which cast enlivening sidelights on the lonely life of the heroine with sustained scenes building slowly on the performances of the principals is also more obtrusive than in the later films, though employed basically in much the same way. The development of the plot, such as it is, is decidedly more linear, concentrating on the woman quietly determined to extract something out of life, despite the dampening presence in the house of her mentally retarded sister. Her relations with the hippy in the garage (sisterly) and with the very quiet, conservative man who seems to offer the chance of something more lasting are given space to develop—especially in the long central scene where the two possible lovers have almost as much trouble actually bringing themselves to the point of kissing as the two much simpler, much sillier young people do in *The Kiss of Death*.

But even *Bleak Moments*, though offering us our first tour round a corner of Leigh's world, does not provide any easy answers about the nature of the spell his films manage to cast. Indeed, more perhaps than any of the others, it forces us back on the telepathic theory of film communication: there is no apparent reason why we should be interested in these bleak moments of drab lives except that the quality of Leigh's interest conveys itself to us with total conviction. He manages from the start to enforce unquestioning belief in these people, even when they do what seem to be wildly uncharacteristic things (like the heroine suddenly over-enlivening a conversation by suggesting that her potential boy-

friend take his trousers off). This ability to summon up purely human interest has been oddly disregarded as a source of cinematic strength in the last few years, and yet in the hands of Renoir or Ford—to pick a couple of unlikely names out of the hat—it frequently turns out to be the *sine qua non*.

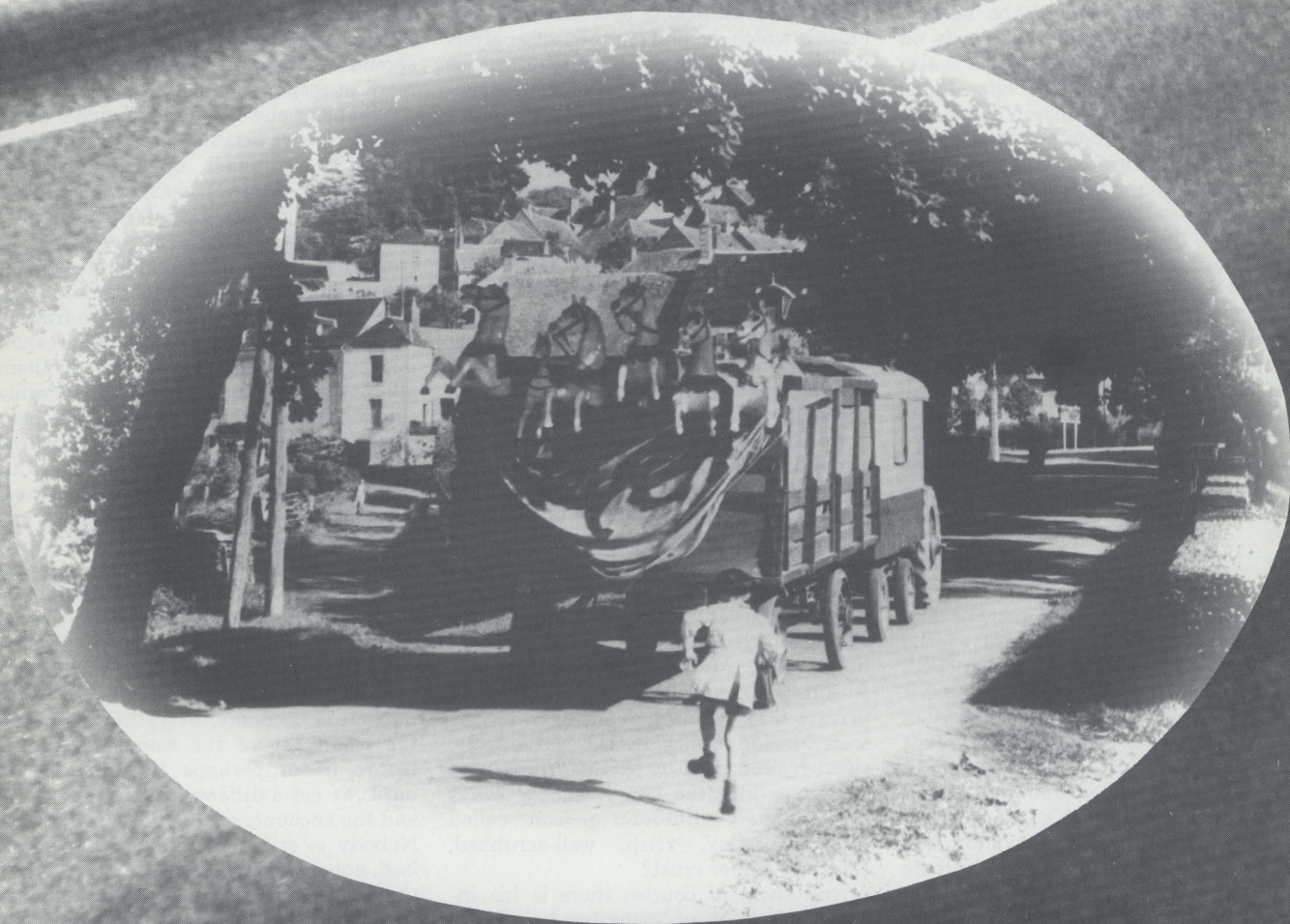
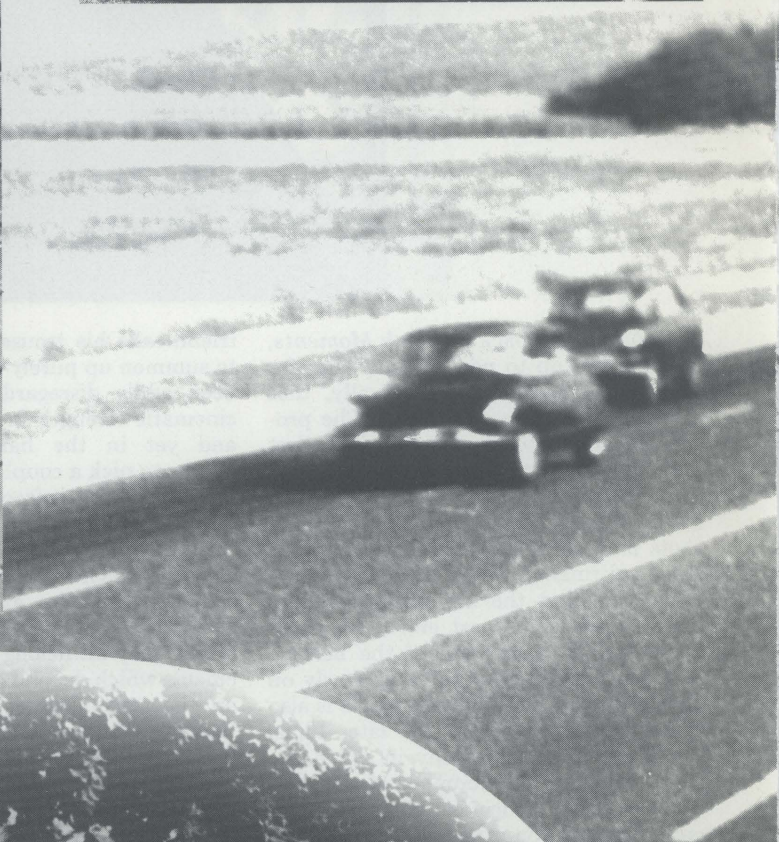
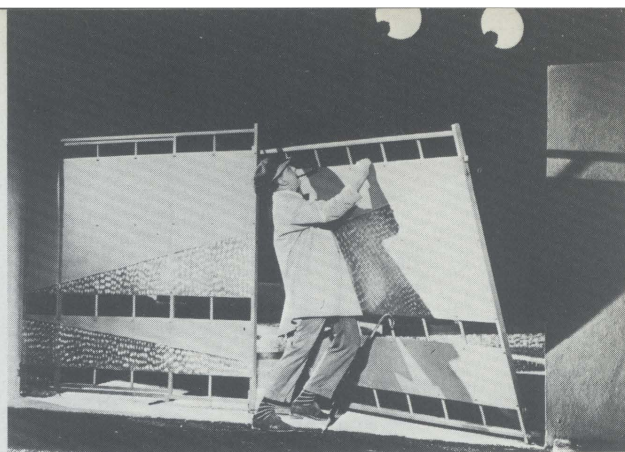
It may seem strange to suggest that *Bleak Moments* or *Grown Ups* is the same sort of film as *The Sun Shines Bright* or *Le Dejeuner sur l'herbe*, yet finally they all belong to a sort of poetic cinema which depends in the last analysis on the sensibility of its creator rather than signs and signals and evident structural devices. All of them defy genre analysis because they create their own genres; and if that is a problem these days for Ford and Renoir in terms of fashionable critical attitudes, it certainly must be for Mike Leigh. There is no critical clout in being a neo-neo-realist, and even if there were, he tends to lose the possible good marks for social responsibility by picking the wrong classes (middle to lower-middle) and leaving his (and so our) attitudes to them thoroughly ambiguous.

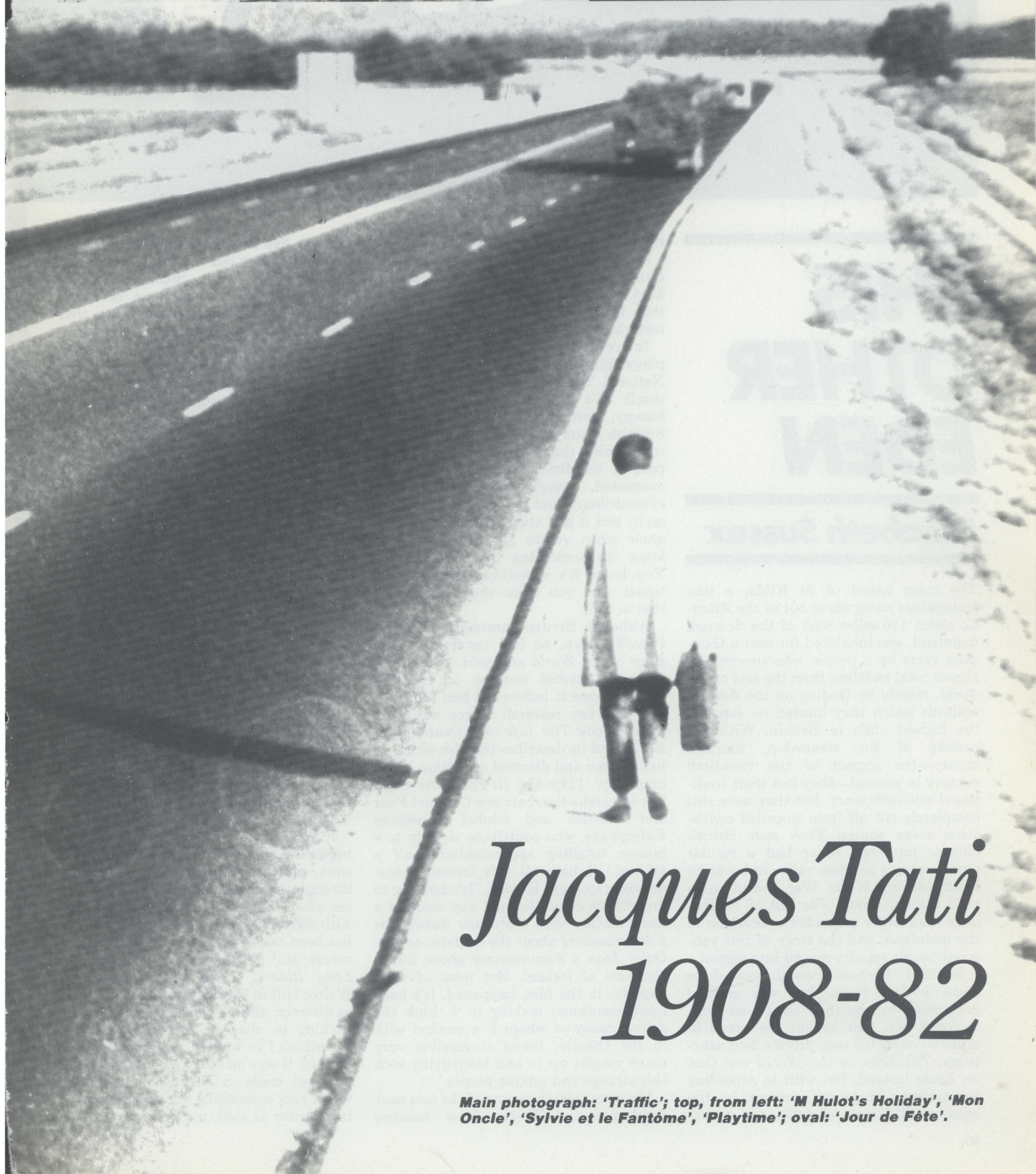
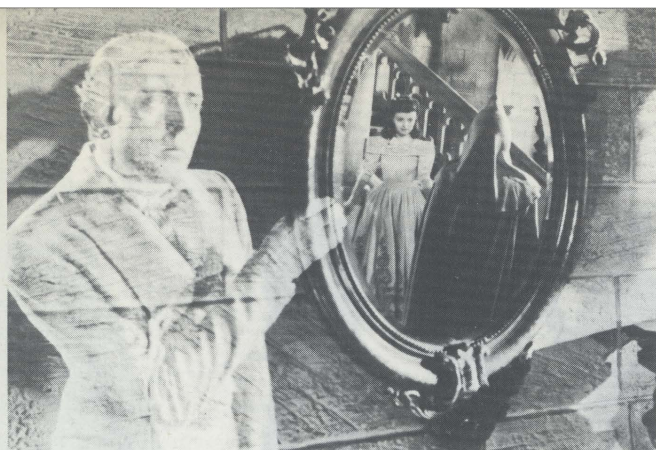
He also confounds sentimental oversimplifications by using something approaching a stock company, but eschewing the advantages of instant recognition this usually entails. His actors really are unrecognisable from role to role. Who, for example, would even recognise the statuesque Beverley in *Abigail's Party* and the wan, wispy Candice Marie in *Nuts in May* as the same person, Alison Steadman (Mrs Mike Leigh in private life)? Or not be amazed, having seen Marion Bailey as the pathetically sluttish croupière in *Goose Pimples*, to encounter in *Mike Leigh Making Plays* a completely different person called Marion Bailey, crisp, well-scrubbed, relaxedly upper crust?

And then, of course, there is his ineradicable habit of 'going too far'. There is, often, a neck-or-nothing quality about his work which has no parallel in the British cinema apart from the controlled

frenzy of Lindsay Anderson (and indeed, in *Britannia Hospital* especially, there are passages where they come within easy hailing distance of one another). There are not even many other creators in other genres (David Storey? Emily Bronte?) who capture so precisely the characteristically English combination of frivolity and hysteria: Leigh's characters would undoubtedly be among those who, in the immortal words of an indignant letter writer to *The Times*, would be ready at the time of Britain's final decline and fall to 'sink giggling beneath the waves'. Nor should we forget that often a giggle is the readiest response to pain...

Whatever else it may be, Leigh's world is not a comfortable one. Its qualities might be summed up in one brief sequence of *Home Sweet Home*, an interlude without consequence in the sex life of the divorced postman. A single shot from the outside of a launderette establishes that he is there, paying faint attention to the only other occupant, a frowsty woman of uncertain age. Another shot, inside a pub, shows the two of them glumly sitting, after a drink or two, while she pathetically chatters on about only drinking beer and having her doubts whether she would like anything else. Cut to his bedroom, afterwards. As she gracelessly dresses, she runs on about how she doesn't really use launderettes, only goes there for the company, while he, patently restive, waits for her to go. And finally, a shot out through his front door, as she shambles off down the path, hoping vaguely—and with little likelihood—that they will run into each other again. With maximum economy, everything is there: the whole life of the woman is spread before us in perhaps two minutes at most; we get a different insight into him; and the encounter is funny as well as sad. Nobody is criticised, nobody is patronised, nobody is made fun of. Like Everest, they have to be tackled because they are there. And like Everest, they are so completely, undeniably there that whatever we happen to feel about them could hardly matter less. ■





Jacques Tati 1908-82

Main photograph: 'Traffic'; top, from left: 'M Hulot's Holiday', 'Mon Oncle', 'Sylvie et le Fantôme', 'Playtime'; oval: 'Jour de Fête'.



THIS OTHER EDEN

Elizabeth Sussex

The main island of St Kilda, a tiny archipelago rising sheer out of the Atlantic about 110 miles west of the Scottish mainland, was inhabited for over a thousand years by a people who survived in almost total isolation from the rest of the world, mainly by feeding on the flesh of seabirds which they hunted on some of the highest cliffs in Britain. With the coming of the steamship, tourism, money—the impact of the twentieth century in general—they lost their traditional self-sufficiency, but they were still completely cut off from so-called civilisation every winter. They were British citizens but they never had a regular postal service or even radio link except briefly during World War I, and so in 1930 the end came. The last 36 St Kildans reluctantly requested evacuation to the mainland, and the story of this vanished people rapidly moved into legend.

In 1937 Michael Powell wanted to make a film there, but was refused permission by the then owner, an ornithologist who had bought the island in order to enjoy his own private bird sanctuary. *The Edge of the World* was shot on Foula instead, but with it, according to Andrew Buchanan writing in the autumn 1937 issue of *SIGHT AND SOUND*,

the 'fictional-documentary' arrived. That a film with an invented plot like Powell's could ever have been described as any kind of 'documentary' is revealing, but then this subject always had that minatory ring of truth about it.

In recent years Bill Bryden, the Scots playwright and associate director of the National Theatre, was caught up in its thrall: 'It's a story in the romance of history, certainly in the romance of Scottish history... a great story about a community that was actually the first part of the British Empire ever to be evacuated, depopulated. I found that extraordinary and did a lot of research on it, and it just stayed with me... You know when you've got the story. You know it's something that is dramatic. You know it's something that is emotional. And you know that's something that is true.'

Although Bryden enormously admires Powell's work, he had never seen *The Edge of the World* and held off seeing it when he started working on his own script in case it influenced him too literally. His key research source was Tom Steel's book *The Life and Death of St Kilda*, and he describes the film which he has written and directed as 'fiction based upon fact'. (The film *Ill Fares the Land* is a co-production between Channel Four and Scottish and Global Television Enterprises, who contribute equally to a budget totalling approximately half a million.) 'I hate all this faction, docu-drama crap,' says Bryden. 'It's nothing to do with us at all. It's not any more of a documentary than *Cheyenne Autumn* is a documentary about the Indians, or *The Quiet Man* a documentary about life in the west of Ireland. But most of what happens in the film, happened. It's been quite emotional making it. I think the actors, many of whom I've worked with in the theatre, found themselves very much caught up in and identifying with this strange and unique people.'

We were talking on one of the sets near Applecross in Wester Ross because

Bryden, like Powell before him, had been unable to carry out his first intention of filming on St Kilda. Some shots have been made there, but none involving actors. 'We gradually became aware that we couldn't do it on St Kilda for a number of different reasons, and that what we had to do was create our own St Kilda,' said producer Robert Love. The main difficulty of course was the question of accommodating an average of sixty people for over a month on what is now an advisedly inhospitable military base. So they found the deserted village of Lonbain and built the St Kilda street on its ruins. They based themselves at the nearby West Highland School of Adventure, and constructed interior sets there as well as in several neighbouring houses. To anyone who had browsed over the grainy photographs of life on St Kilda in the late 20s, the replicated street, the cottage interiors with lamps slung low, the treeless landscapes peopled with silent ghosts in dark serge clothing, first triggered off a shock of recognition, and then evoked that eerie sense of the unattainable that informs the whole subject. On the front of his script Bryden quotes L. P. Hartley: 'The past is a foreign country. They do things differently there.' The real St Kilda is for us in fact a place forever out of reach. That is part of the power of the legend.

I had arrived in Applecross at the beginning of Week 5 of filming, the last week, and they were moving so briskly through the schedule that I was lucky to see all the sets before they were struck. Although some of Bryden's theatre work has been televised under the direction of others, and he has written a script, *The Long Riders*, which was directed by Walter Hill in 1980, this was his first film as director, and he was obviously leaving nothing to chance. 'To make films is something I've wanted to do all my life,' he said. 'I was lucky enough to write one that got made in Hollywood, and that was a very interesting experience. But to be a writer *as well*, to be writing for the



'Ill Fares the Land'.
Photographs: Douglas Dawson.

camera I think is a great privilege and I hope one's not abusing it in any way.'

'Bill actually for two years sort of chased me,' said lighting cameraman John Coquillon, whose work includes *Straw Dogs*, *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* and *Cross of Iron*, and who was getting evening phone calls from Sam Peckinpah about the film he would be shooting for him in about a month's time in Los Angeles. 'We'd never met but apparently Bill had seen some of my work, and we spoke for two years about this picture. We finally got together and it's worked out very successfully. I hope we do many more. His staging is fabulous, and he has a good eye. I think we'll be hearing a lot more about Bill.'

Peckinpah's shooting schedule was to be twelve weeks, a short one by cinema standards but still more than twice as long as Bryden's. According to Coquillon the determining factor is the size of the locations and the sets. 'These very small ones here are in some ways more difficult to photograph than a bigger area, but because they are so small we have to keep everything quite simple.'

Ill Fares the Land shows the last two years or so in the life of St Kilda through the eyes of three generations of the Gillies family: Donald (James Grant), his father (Fulton Mackay) and his son of about nine (a local discovery named George MacInnes). These are fictional characters based on known facts about real people, as were the characters in Bryden's first two plays. The subject of *Willie Rough* (1972) was his own grandfather, a riveter and passionately committed shop steward in the Greenock shipyards during the First World War. His second play, *Benny Lynch* (1974), was about the kid from the Gorbals who won the World Flyweight Championship in 1935 and died of drink eleven years later. Both were performed originally under his direction at the Royal Lyceum, Edinburgh, and *Willie Rough* launched

Bryden in more ways than one because when it came to London Peter Hall saw it and offered him a job at the National Theatre.

'I suppose everything is a kind of Western,' Bryden says. 'I was brought up with Westerns and with John Ford's films, and I suppose in this film the two young men, Donald Gillies and Willie MacDonald, are in fact the same characters as Willie Rough and Charlie McGrath in the play—and James Grant, who played Willie Rough, is playing Donald. (*McGrath is the ambitious trade union leader who lures Rough into politics and a prison sentence; Willie MacDonald, played in the film by David Hayman, is the one who left St Kilda to work in Glasgow.*) It's for other people to analyse what you're doing, but one can see that's probably two sides of my character. Willie Rough, or Donald Gillies in this film, is the one who wants to stay in Scotland, who wants to make it better, make it work. The other half of me is the one who wants to be in an aeroplane.'

The St Kildans had the ideal society, without politics, money, taxes or arms—except for the gun left there for their benefit in 1918 and eventually allowed to rust away without ever being fired. But they also lacked doctors or the means of summoning urgent medical aid. Of the four funerals that occur in the film, one is for a man who died of appendicitis, another for four victims of an influenza epidemic, a third for a child struck down by one of those mysterious infections that had long since removed so many infants that the population had become a predominantly ageing one.

At Applecross and Lonbain you were usually conscious of at least one coffin lying about—that and dead seabirds:

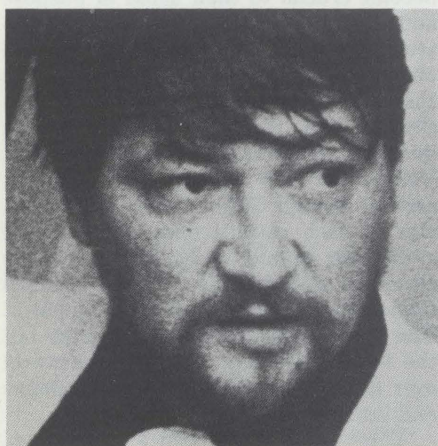
twenty dead fulmar figured on the props list every day that week, plus a plate of roasted puffins on Wednesday afternoon. The fulmar was essential to the St Kildans' economy. They had a use for every part of it (feathers, oil, flesh, bones, even entrails) and fulmar hunting had become crucial to their sense of purpose and identity. During the filming the signs seemed very clear as the boy was taken up the mountain and initiated into the sport: the low-angle shot against the skyline, the landscape looking for a moment remarkably like Monument Valley, and later (though they filmed it earlier) Donald Gillies laying a dead fulmar at each cottage door (they shared everything equally on St Kilda) and the close-ups of the birds. 'The usual dead fulmar shot,' as Bryden laughingly put it. The iconography may be new to us but the themes are not. Cowboys the world over drive Indians off the buffalo plains and into reservations.

'There must have been another way,' says Bryden. 'I mean, had the St Kildans survived for another nine years, then communication would have arrived as it had done in the First World War. This is proven by the fact that St Kilda is now a missile range, an army encampment. As the man says in the film, in the last service in the church—the missionaries choose the text—"And the kingdom of God suffereth violence. And the violent shall bear it away." That's exactly what happened. The St Kildans are now a scattered people with only memories. It was a very tough life for them certainly, and there were problems of interbreeding and so on that would have had to be solved, but I don't think anybody in the government considered very much how to improve the economy of St Kilda. I think it was that kind of problem that had to be got rid of.'

Every evening we looked at rushes in the schoolroom set, a replica of the room where the St Kildans once saw a tourist film about themselves. We watched actors impersonating the St Kildans who at one point were watching film of actual St Kildans, most of them now dead. The fact that the islanders were finally beaten by communication problems in the age of cinema and radio and that moving pictures of them still reside in archives, gives their story implications that grow wider the more technologies advance. ■

JAMES ROY MACBEAN

THE SUCCESS AND FAILURE OF RAINER WERNER FASSBINDER



Rainer Werner Fassbinder.

Although I join countless others throughout the international film community in lamenting the sad and untimely death—apparently caused by a lethal mixture of cocaine and sleeping pills—of Rainer Werner Fassbinder, I must acknowledge at the outset of this critical essay that the 36-year-old Fassbinder was hardly one of my favourite film-makers. In fact, although some of his films seem to me much better than others, there is scarcely a single film, in an output of more than forty features, which I can truly say I like and admire with anything approaching unqualified enthusiasm. Moreover, one of those I like best, *Effi Briest* (1974), is hardly a typical Fassbinder film: it is, rather, a film in which his own artistic vision is allied with and placed at the service of a scrupulously faithful and visually impeccable black and white filmed adaptation of Theodor Fontane's marvellous 19th century German novel.

Whether this particular critic likes or dislikes Fassbinder's films is *not* the issue, however, and I acknowledge the element of personal judgment and

preferences simply to indicate that I will not be taking refuge in some pose of detached, academic neutrality that ignores the personal responses in favour of a coldly impersonal formalist analysis. Fassbinder's films, it seems to me, almost literally cry out for heated, intense responses at several levels—artistically, personally and politically. And, for the most part, people have responded strongly to them: Fassbinder has his passionate devotees and his equally passionate detractors. (Sometimes the passionate defender of one Fassbinder film becomes the equally passionate detractor of another Fassbinder film. And why not?) In any case, I simply want to acknowledge that I am in the same boat with everyone else; that some of his films (which ones will become clear in the course of this essay) I actively detest to the point of barely being able to stay through to the end; while others (and these too will be indicated) I find intellectually intriguing and dramatically enjoyable.

With the bulk of his films, however, I find that my reactions are very mixed; and I am struck by how provocatively puzzling a film-maker Fassbinder is, or was. I want to explore this puzzle on all its different levels—the artistic, the personal and the political. And I want to begin by stating that I think Fassbinder's very real achievement as a film-maker lies in his risk-taking ability to walk a tightrope of paradoxes (and contradictions) stretched to the breaking point by the cruel twists of his own masochistic but none the less demanding logic. By the same token, however, it may be that Fassbinder's failings—artistically, politically and personally (the latter being his admitted bouts of severe depression and despair and drugs, culminating in his death, whether the result of inadvertent drug excess or suicide)—were failings very much of his own making, very much the consequences of that masochistic logic which drove him relentlessly to turn the screws ever tighter on himself, until

perhaps both he personally and his artistic tightrope reached the breaking point simultaneously.

If I had to define the puzzling mixture of ingredients that typically make up a Fassbinder film, I would say it was one part loutish truculence, one part intellectual toughness and one part treacly sentimentality. A preliminary puzzle, however, in dealing with Fassbinder, is to figure out how, in a combination of three seemingly equally dosed ingredients, it turns out to be the treacly sentimentality which, in my opinion, leaves the strongest aftertaste.

I do not seem to be alone in finding Fassbinder's films overly sentimental. In the excellent monograph *Fassbinder*, edited by Tony Rayns and published by the British Film Institute, a number of critics remark on the strangely mawkish quality that pervades the films. For example, Thomas Elsaesser writes, 'His films have been described as sentimental, mawkish, moving between pathos and bathos, and it is true that he seems to concentrate rather exclusively on the varieties of pathos, understood as the emotional rhetoric of bourgeois tragedy and melodrama.' Elsaesser adds, 'What is problematic is that Fassbinder's populism may be the worst sort of compromise, aiming at a kind of embourgeoisement where everyone is allowed the luxury of self-pity.'

Self-pity is certainly built right into the narrative of many of Fassbinder's films. His two films on homosexuality—*The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* (1972), which chronicles the self-indulgent tantrums, boozing and self-pity of an ambitious lesbian fashion designer; and *Fox* (1975), featuring Fassbinder himself as the sudsy proletarian gay driven to suicide by the condescending treatment he receives at the hands of bourgeois gays—strike me as oddly masochistic works (especially from an avowedly homosexual film-maker), whose dreary, soap opera approach to gay life

would be of little use to gays or straights.*

Likewise, *Fear Eats the Soul* (1973), a film on the lonely plight of the *Gastarbeiter* (foreign worker)—in this case, Ali, a dark-skinned North African male in his thirties—and of the aged widow—in this case, Emmi, a sixtyish German cleaning woman—who together find a brief, bittersweet solace and a kind of love in joining forces in their marginality (which love, however, across their differences in age and race, makes them outright pariahs even in the society of marginals which is their milieu), strikes me as an even sudsier soap opera, a real tear-jerker for knee-jerk liberals. On the other hand, Fassbinder's earlier film on the *Gastarbeiter* theme, *Katzelmacher* (1969), seems a far less sentimental and far more noteworthy film than *Fear Eats the Soul*. In fact, *Katzelmacher* strikes me as quite a remarkable piece of fictionalised visual anthropology.

While eminently personal, and even idiosyncratic in its vision, *Katzelmacher* achieves some of the quality of an ethnographic film by means of surprisingly non-judgmental phenomenological observation of the milieu of Munich's vaguely bohemian yet oddly provincial clique of marginally employed or unemployed middle-class loafers. As a visual portrait of the Munich *lumpenbourgeoisie*, *Katzelmacher* is superb. Fassbinder's well-dressed but vapid louts hang about listlessly on their favourite street corner, perch on a railing like so many crows on a telephone wire, drift in and out of the

*Where the response of gays is concerned, however, I would defer to others, such as critic Richard Dyer, who points out in his contribution to the BFI monograph that these two films have elicited divided response in gay circles; with most (though not all) lesbians being extremely critical of the 'freak show' quality of *Petra von Kant*, while men tend to be more sharply divided on *Fox*, which some find offers a 'version of homosexuality which degrades us all, and should be roundly denounced' but which others simply find a stimulating point of departure for discussion and consciousness-raising.



'Repetition, variation and reversal — that is the pattern of Fassbinder's closed melodramas.'



Top: 'The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant': Margit Carstensen and Hanna Schygulla. Above: 'The Marriage of Maria Braun': Elisabeth Trissenaar and Hanna Schygulla.

camera frame, doing nothing much, saying little, yet forming endlessly interesting compositions of an almost abstract formal beauty. And Fassbinder's camera, seemingly as vapid and uninterested as his characters, just stares dumbly ahead, sometimes at a blank wall, not even bothering to reframe when people drift in and out of its field of vision, not even batting an eyelash, so to speak, when a young Greek worker, played by Fassbinder, catalyses the stereotypical fears/desires of these Teutonic urban cowboys and of the women who hang around with them.

But in Fassbinder's films a self-consciously mannered style of phenomenological observation turns out by no means to be incompatible with rank sentimentality, and even *Katzelmacher* veers off in that direction towards the end when the Greek, Jorgos, is victimised and beaten up by his 'buddies' and dropped by the women. Still, such a laconic, unobtrusive style of observation at least affords the viewer some possibility of distancing oneself from the action and the characters, and yet remaining

ments and failed ambitions which eat away at Hans' soul.

But whichever tack Fassbinder takes, whether hysterical stylisation or subdued observation, one could conclude from the lurid melodramas which are the staple plots of all his films that his prolific cinematic opus is really a vast body of remakes of daytime television soap operas for late-night bohemian film-cultists. Everything in Fassbinder's films seems overdone, overworked, overwrought and full of claustrophobic in-group references (just like the soaps).

Even in *The Marriage of Maria Braun* (1978)—and here I would concur with the consensus which singles out this film as Fassbinder's most successful overall—the central theme, of the emotional toll taken by coping with the dire expediency of civilian life during war and its aftermath, seems tediously drawn out to the point of almost numbing redundancy. Well executed though it is, *Maria Braun*, at two hours length, seems almost a third longer than it needs to be to depict effectively the emotional freeze behind the will-to-power of the postwar German

Willy Brandt, whom Fassbinder seems to spare from the implicit criticism which would implicate all the others in the postwar German tragedy we have just witnessed.

In *The Marriage of Maria Braun*, the overworked themes and overwrought sentimentality that are the stock in trade of Fassbinder's films are at least bolstered by his intellectual toughness, by the breadth and depth of his portrait of a Germany willing and able to commit all energies to a preconceived and schematic ideal of happiness. But, in other of his films, when I try to locate his intellectual toughness I find that I have trouble distinguishing it from his posture of loutish truculence; that I can't really say how rigorous and thorough his mind is, or how much he simply gets away with a pose of intellectual toughness by acknowledging only certain types of complexity—those which add fuel to the fires of melodrama—but not other types which would call forth a less melodramatic sense of conflict and struggle. What I'm getting at, in short, is that I

'...remakes of daytime television soap operas for late-night bohemian film cultists.'

interested in the film. On the other hand, Fassbinder's alternative approach—as in the hysteria-ridden *Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*, in which the camera spends long periods down on the floor with the boozy Petra and her gin bottle; or in the high camp tragedy, *In a Year with 13 Moons* (1978), where the audience gets no respite (visual or aural) from the unrelenting whining of a self-pitying transsexual who spends the duration of the film bemoaning his/her failed relationships both before and after the sex change operation—unfortunately offers the viewer little possibility of distancing oneself from the action and characters, and yet sustaining any interest in the film. (My reaction to films like these latter is to want to distance myself altogether; and I have to struggle, as I mentioned earlier, against the temptation to distance myself by literally walking out of the film.)

Fortunately, however, *Katzelmacher* is not the only film in which the director avoids hysterical excess; and two other early films, *Why Does Herr R Run Amok?* (1969) and *The Merchant of Four Seasons* (1971), also reveal Fassbinder taking a fairly subdued tack toward his material (although the material itself is just as melodramatic in these two films as in all the others). In *Herr R*, Fassbinder forgoes stylisation to let the visual drabness of an ordinary, successful middle-class worker's life speak visual volumes of the quiet desperation that leads him to murder his family and hang himself. And in *The Merchant of Four Seasons* he unobtrusively uses the luminous outdoor colour (occasionally enhanced by filters) of the fruit and vegetable vendor's milieu as a subtle contrast to the disappoint-

economic recovery. The film seems to me to drag early on, as Fassbinder sets the plot in motion all too schematically by having Maria Braun (luminously played by Hanna Schygulla) marry, during an air-raid, a soldier she has only just met (and who must leave immediately for the front); then devote all her energies to the thin hope of being reunited with this soldier husband.

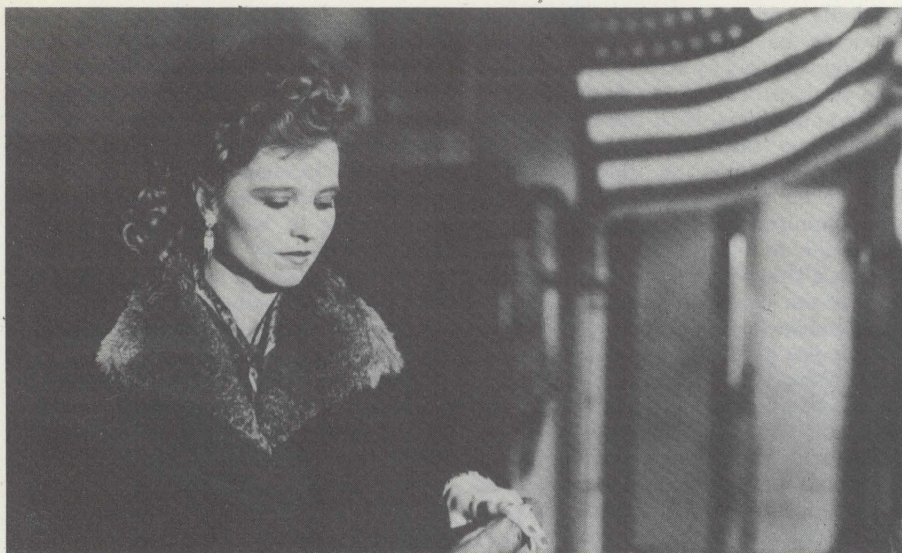
But *Maria Braun* picks up considerably when the heroine, finally presuming her husband dead, takes up, first, with a gentle black GI (whom she implacably kills, however, when her husband unexpectedly reappears and a fight breaks out between him and the GI) and, later, with a wealthy industrialist who dotes on her even to the point of reaching a secret agreement with her husband. (Having taken the blame for the murder of the GI upon himself, to spare Maria, the husband languishes in prison until, seemingly through the auspices of the industrialist, he is released and leaves to seek work in Canada.) But the film really comes together dramatically at the end when, after the suicide of the industrialist, the long-awaited husband returns. And the coming together of Maria and her husband, so anti-climactic on the surface, implicitly reveals, retrospectively, all kinds of emotional manipulations that went into their past behaviour toward one another; and which now does reach a climax after all in the sudden explosion (which may or may not be an accident), followed by the film's concluding series of black and white photographs of Chancellors Adenauer, Kiesinger, Erhardt, Schmidt and company—all West Germany's postwar heads of state, that is, with the conspicuous exception of

find in many of his films a disturbingly cheap side even to Fassbinder's intellectual toughness, which is manifested all too often in the way he merely goes about piling up all manner of adversities, setbacks and disillusionments for his protagonists to suffer—and which, while it does help demonstrate some of the complexities of life in society, also smacks of fatalism and a stagy cynicism.

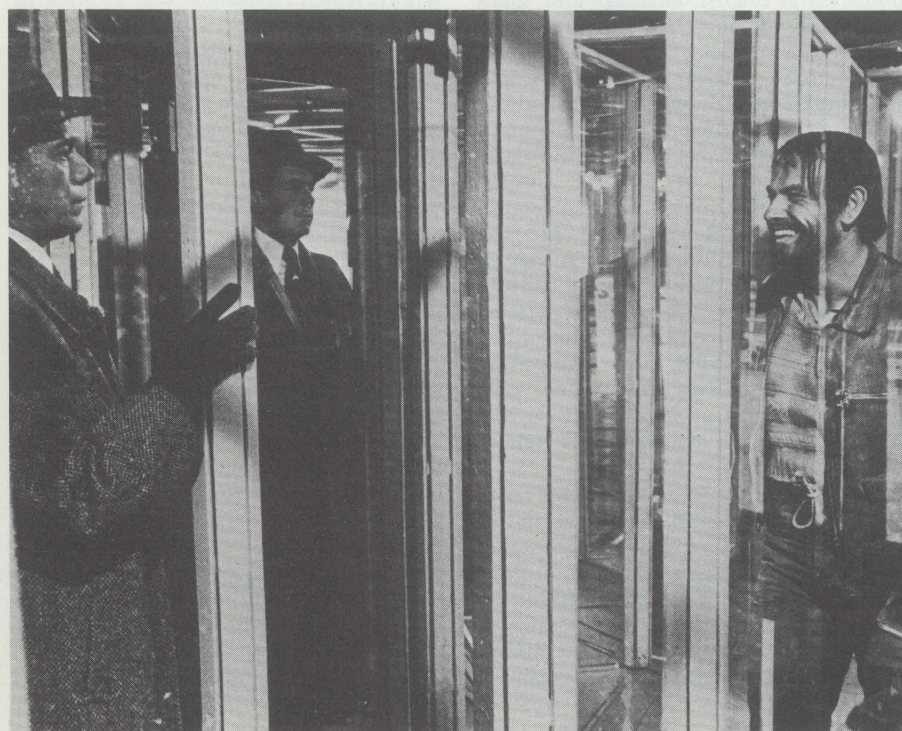
Then, too, one never knows, with Fassbinder, whether 'appearances' correspond to anything deeper, anything more 'truly' felt or believed. Of course, Fassbinder seems to be saying that we never get beyond appearances anyway, so that is all we have to go on. But it's as if everything in his world—all human emotions, all ideas, all ethical or political values—were, first, assumed to be nothing but platitudes, clichés, conventions; and, second, then played to the hilt anyway, with the utmost theatricality (but a monotonous, diffident, 'camp' theatricality).

It is a world where one is condemned to endless repetitions of stock phrases, stock emotions, stock ideas. These are spun out in countless variations until, unravelling, they double back on themselves and on the characters who give them expression. Repetition, variation and reversal—that is the pattern of Fassbinder's closed melodramas. But the reversal is not reversal of fortunes; no, on the contrary, it's a redoubling of misfortunes, a compounding of the woes of life, which by the end of a film have come to press in from new, unexpected quarters as well as from their old sources.

In *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*, for example, Petra, bored with her lesbian lover, Marlene, has a fling with



Above: Hanna Schygulla in 'The Marriage of Maria Braun'. Left: Petra von Kant (Margit Carstensen) down on the floor with her gin bottle. Below: Dirk Bogarde and Klaus Löwitsch lost in the mirror images of 'Despair'.



Karin, who soon returns to her husband, which sends Petra into paroxysms of self-pity until she returns her attentions to Marlene, who promptly leaves her also, bringing on more paroxysms, etc. In *Mother Küsters' Trip to Heaven* (1975), Mother Küsters is harassed by scandal-mongering journalists from the right-wing press after her husband has killed one of his bosses and then committed suicide at work. She is briefly consoled by her son Ernst (and his wife) and by her daughter Corinna, a cabaret singer. But Ernst and his wife are embarrassed by the scandal and move away; and Corinna uses the notoriety to further her singing career, thus ruthlessly exploiting her mother (and dead father). So Mother Küsters turns to the friendly Communist couple, the Thälmanns, who offer advice and help in fighting the reactionary press and clearing her name. But soon they too are exploiting Mother Küsters to win Communist Party brownie points; and so the story goes on.

This facile piling up of adversities, in plots already heavy with contrived melodrama, makes Fassbinder vulnerable to the charge that he is stacking the deck against his characters and espousing a cheap, shabby sort of fatalism. In an article in *Film Quarterly* (Winter 1976/77) dealing with all Fassbinder's films up to *Satan's Brew* (1976), Paul Thomas asked rhetorically, 'Why should Ali be stricken with the "immigrant's disease" at the end of *Fear Eats the Soul* just as Emmi so movingly forgives and accepts him? Why does *Wildwechsel* (Jailbait in the USA, 1972) need the *coup de grâce* of Hanni's being told by the gynaecologist (Hanna Schygulla) that her baby was born dead and deformed? It's arguable that the remarkable thing is the extent to which Fassbinder gets away with hitting home in this fashion.' I can only wholeheartedly agree; although I would also turn the argument back on Thomas himself and point out that when, in spite of all the flaws he perceives in Fassbinder's melodramatic excesses and contrivances, he can still glibly say that 'what emerges is the possibility of a genuine, non-dogmatic Marxist (sic) cinema', then, to me, the extent to which Fassbinder gets away with his melodramatic logic does indeed appear remarkable.*

In *The Third Generation* (1979), Fassbinder carries this pattern of repetition, variation and reversal to the extreme of depicting a gang of bourgeois terrorists whose anti-State violence turns out to be used and controlled (and even planned) by the State and its cohorts the multi-nationals. And the reversal, characteristically, has a correlative reversal at the level of allusions to film history. The embodiment of the State's ability to co-opt (and even effectively take over) the terrorist movement is played by none

*West German Marxists, however, have been less taken in by Fassbinder than some of his more glib left-oriented defenders in Britain and the USA; and Fassbinder's films have regularly met widespread and vehement denunciation from the radical Left in his home country.

other than Eddie Constantine, who in *Alphaville* played the rugged individualist, Lemmy Caution, who waged battle against the threat to poetic spontaneity posed by 'Alpha 60' and the technocrats of the computerised World.

If we think of Eddie Constantine's work with Godard in *Alphaville* as falling within what Fassbinder would call 'the second generation' (perhaps not only in the history of terrorism but also in postwar film history), then it is very interesting indeed that Fassbinder has Constantine/Caution step into *The Third Generation*'s equivalent of the 'Alpha 60' role. (And, incidentally, Godard originally wanted Roland Barthes to play the Wernher von Braun, or 'Alpha 60' role in *Alphaville*.) I would say, in fact, that this particular repetition, variation and reversal (of roles, actors, themes, etc) relates in a significant way to a pertinent connection between Constantine/Caution's rugged individualism in *Alphaville*—the traditional individualism of the private eye—and the contemporary corporate version of rugged individualism—not private eye but private enterprise—

decidedly unsympathetic. They are shown to be hopelessly bourgeois and naive (epitomised by actress Bulle Ogier's wide-eyed radical chic). And as Fassbinder emphasises, their terrorism seems to have no rationale other than the ritualised gestures of the adventure itself—a far cry from the doggedly earnest commitment of Lemmy Caution in *Alphaville* or even from the obviously intense, although arguably naive commitment of the young militants in Godard's *La Chinoise* (to which *The Third Generation* also implicitly makes allusion).

But although we might find it intellectually stimulating to trace all the allusions and self-references, and to hypothesise about the meanings of the repetitions and reversals at various levels of Fassbinder's work, this self-gratifying, intellectually masturbatory excitement of the critic and the film-cultist cannot hide the fact that for anyone else (who understandably finds it difficult to tell the players, and the in-group references, without a scorecard), there is likely to be a sense of let-down at the lack of commitment to anything outside the oblique

generations' films (most notably, perhaps, Godard's, but Fassbinder also cites Welles' *Touch of Evil*, Curtiz's *Flamingo Road* and Visconti's *Conversation Piece*). But this opportunism seems to me an unfortunate and drastic dilution of artistic and intellectual intent. Where Godard, in his films, tries to explore the possibilities of both radical new forms and radical new content, Fassbinder sticks to old forms (mainly melodrama) and obsessively rehashes old content in making pastiches of old films (his own and others').

Moreover, where Godard manages to combine a strong quotient of self-referentiality (to his private persona, to his own earlier films, and to the films of others) with a none the less sustained intensity of concern for social and political issues, Fassbinder offers us only either a self-indulgent and sentimental identification with minorities as victims (proletarians, foreign workers, women, gays, the aged), whose self-pity is presented as a spectacle that substitutes for commitment; or a hopelessly claustrophobic web of self-references that fails to reach out

'...in life, as in his films, he found the personal and political contradictions overwhelming.'

which, in *The Third Generation*, wields the instruments of control in a tight web of collusion between the State and the multi-nationals (and perhaps the Mob).

In short, Fassbinder depicts Constantine/Caution as having wised up to which side his bread is buttered on. In *The Third Generation*, the veteran individualist finds that his bread is buttered on the side of those other rugged individualists who sit on the world's boards of directors, that is, with the corporate and State technocrats, who are even kind enough to give him a computerised video system (and a beautiful double-agent played by Hanna Schygulla) to help him keep everything under control ... à la 'Alpha 60'.

In a *New York Times* obituary article on Fassbinder, Vincent Canby observed that although Fassbinder considered himself a man of the political Left, Canby wouldn't have been surprised, after seeing *The Third Generation*, if he hadn't eventually wound up with the extreme Right! Although I don't think even an individual as given to extremes as Fassbinder would have gone that far, I can certainly see why the thought occurs to Canby (and to all of us, where Fassbinder's personal and political development is concerned). Indeed, judging from Fassbinder's sympathetic handling of Eddie Constantine's individualist turned right-wing superspy and mastermind of infiltration and control, I would say that the thought of his own vulnerability to the attractiveness of extreme right-wing solutions seems clearly to have occurred to Fassbinder himself.

As for his depiction of the left-wing terrorists in *The Third Generation*, it is

and esoteric formal and thematic web of cinematic self-references. Moreover, this problem—of the ubiquity of cinematic self-references and the concomitant paucity of commitment or even meaningful relation to the socio-political situation in which we live—seems to have haunted Fassbinder increasingly in recent years.

This let-down, or weakening of political nerve, is evident, it seems to me, not only in *The Third Generation* but also in the earlier *Despair* (1977), which, as Fassbinder's first English-language film, seeks a widening audience but also drastically narrows the subject of investigation to a closed circuit network of mirror images that imperfectly delineate the shadowy nature of individual identity. Thomas Elsaesser, in the excellent essay on Fassbinder's 'Cinema of Vicious Circles' already quoted, examines an enormously rich variety of personal and political issues that are explored (albeit in 'vicious circles') by Fassbinder's films up to 1977. But he is obliged to tack on a detailed but drastically more circumscribed 'Afterword', in which he is reduced to rehearsing obsessively Fassbinder's own narrowing circles of identity crisis and desperation in the claustrophobic mirror images of *Despair*.

And by the time we the audience reach the 1979 film *The Third Generation*, it becomes painfully obvious early on that the posturing terrorism relates to nothing outside itself, and that Fassbinder's interest in it lies in the opportunity it offers him to present this generation's terrorist stance as an empty repetition of earlier 'generations' struggles—and to make of this film a pastiche of earlier

to anything beyond the closed circle of the self (and the in-group seen as narcissistic extension of that self).

It is ironic that Fassbinder himself was aware of this problem, yet thought he had solved it a long time ago. As he saw it, 'By the time I made *Beware of a Holy Whore* (1970) I had found a way of using autobiographical material less onanistically, so that what I had to say about myself became more generally valid. I started to see myself in relation to the world around me ...'

Ironically, however, *Beware of a Holy Whore*, which Fassbinder sees as marking a turn for the better, a turn towards the world around him, strikes me as being the most dreadful, most tedious, most claustrophobic, most narcissistic (or, to use his own term, 'onanistic') of all his films. It is a film totally enclosed within the 'vicious circles' of its own making. Significantly, it is, like that other narcissistic piece of sentimental twaddle, Truffaut's *Day for Night*, a film about the making of a film. But where Truffaut's sentimentality lies in his naive belief that the tawdriness and superficiality of the 'real' world (and 'real' people) behind the scenes of a film in progress can be magically transformed, not only on celluloid but also in 'reality' by the magic wand of the cinema, Fassbinder's sentimentality lies in the bitter cynicism and self-pity with which he mires us in the tawdriness and superficiality—and sheer venality—of both the 'real' and the celluloid worlds. And the only claim put forth for *Beware of a Holy Whore* having any wider, more general validity than as a depiction of Fassbinder's personal failure to make collective group-work function democratically, has been the suggestion that the



Above: 'The Third Generation': Eddie Constantine, individualist turned right-wing superspy. Left: 'Mother Küsters' Trip to Heaven': Mother Küsters (Brigitte Mira) with her son (Armin Meier) and his wife. Below: Fassbinder and his mother in 'Germany in Autumn'.

film depicts (some would say 'wallows in') the venal petty power-plays in which we all are mired.*

Granted, the petty power-plays of the presentation of self in everyday life *do* indeed constitute a universal theme of sorts, as we all know only too well. The problem is, however, that Fassbinder's obsessive variations on this theme are rarely capable of sustaining an emotionally or dramatically gripping interest throughout the length of the film. (They certainly are not capable of doing so in *Beware of a Holy Whore* or *The Third Generation*.)

I have already explained why I find Fassbinder significantly lacking, both in emotional and intellectual intensity, in comparison with Godard; and I think another revealing comparison can be made with another film-maker of 'the second generation' of postwar film history—Miklos Jancsó. Fassbinder's films, with all their repetitions, variations and reversals, remind me thematically, although not formally, of the films of Jancsó. In both cases, these are films in which victims and executioners, reds and whites, right and left, State and *people* are endlessly changing roles in an elaborately choreographed play of ritual power that seems to go nowhere but ends up being called History.

But Jancsó's films are formally very beautiful and emotionally very strong—the latter due in part to the obviously intense political commitment of his characters. Though they may be thematically a bit shallow and redundant (both within any one film and from one film to another), they nevertheless are gripping in their formal and emotional power. Fassbinder's films, on the other hand, usually have a strong theme (homosexuality, exploitation, terrorism, etc), but they ultimately come off as emotionally weak, because of the trite sentimentality of the plot, and visually rather uninspiring. (Either pictorially slick, as in *Despair*, *Maria Braun*, *The Third Generation* and *Lili Marleen*, or insistently ugly, as in, among other cases, the blatantly ugly but none the less remarkable sequences Fassbinder contributed to *Germany in Autumn*.)

Germany in Autumn (1978) is a two-hour film put together collectively by Fassbinder, Alexander Kluge, Volker Schlöndorff and others (including the novelist Heinrich Böll, who participated in scripting the commentary). It deals with the troubled state of the West German nation at the time, in late 1977, of

*In interviews, Fassbinder acknowledged that *Beware of a Holy Whore* is a frank recapitulation of the circumstances of the shooting of his film *Whity* (1970), during which it became obvious to all concerned that the non-hierarchical aspirations of Fassbinder's old Anti-Theatre collective (who were working with him on many of his films) were breaking down as everyone increasingly looked to Fassbinder for direction, and that the collective itself was disintegrating in petty ego-squabbles—which failures, however, Fassbinder would suggest were universal ones. (See, among others, the interviews collected in Rayns [ed.], *ibid.*)

the controversial suppression of civil liberties in the *Berufsverbot* legislation that came in the wake of the terrorist kidnapping and execution of industrialist Schleyer, and of the inexplicable deaths in Stammheim Prison (allegedly by suicide, although many question this 'official' version) of three imprisoned members of the Baader-Meinhof political leadership. The film begins with documentary footage and commentary on the lavish Schleyer funeral; ends with documentary footage and commentary on the massive, spontaneous funeral for the Baader-Meinhof leaders; and, in the middle, presents Fassbinder's contribution of quasi-autobiographical acted sequences in which he plays himself. Overall, it offers a remarkable and probing meditation on history, on the German soul, and on the times in which, even now, several years later, we live and die.

Fassbinder's sequences focus fixatedly on himself, first returning to his Munich apartment and to his longstanding homosexual lover after hearing the news (while in Paris) of the deaths of the Baader-Meinhof prisoners; and, secondly, tape-recording a kitchen-table interview-discussion about the political situation between himself and an elderly woman who, we gradually come to realise, is his mother. In fact, the mother is 'played' (if that is the right word) by Fassbinder's own mother, Liselotte Eder, who played in several of his earlier films under the name Lilo Pempeit, and the male lover by Armin Meier, the dedicatee of *Fox* and a supporting actor in many of Fassbinder's films from 1975 to his suicide in 1978.

The two sequences are actually intercut, with sudden jumps back and forth, although they are held together logically both by their common theme—the political situation of the moment in Germany—and by the domesticity of the scenes. In the apartment with Armin (whom Fassbinder calls by his real name), Fassbinder agitatedly broods aloud about the strict police and military crackdown on civil liberties and about the hardly credible 'official' version of the prison deaths. Talking briefly on the phone (once to his 'wife'* and once to someone from whom he orders cocaine), he comments on the mystery of how guns could allegedly have got into the hands of the Baader-Meinhof prisoners, who were held in the tightest maximum security imaginable; and he also expresses what seems to be his own amazement (or is he voicing the general public's, or both?) at how 'a girl like Ulrika Meinhof could become a terrorist'. In the kitchen discussion with his mother (who calls him Rainer), Fassbinder goads her rather unmercifully, then abrasively puts down the middle-class logic of her longings for order and stability.

But what is most interesting—and, on Fassbinder's part, most courageously revealing—is the way he interacts with

Armin, whom he orders around like a slave ('Armin! Do this. Armin! Do that. Armin! Make me coffee'), and whom he seems to talk *through* rather than *to* at all times except when he wants something from him. At one point, ranting on about the political situation (but perhaps also frustrated at having flushed his cocaine down the lavatory in fear of a police raid which never materialised), Fassbinder seems to goad Armin purposely into making some innocuous remark that he can take offence at. Whereupon he upbraids Armin furiously, calls him a fascist, and literally kicks him out of the door of the apartment... only to shout desperately for him to return a moment later.

Moreover, when Armin, having dutifully returned, tries to comfort Fassbinder (he puts an arm round his shoulder and asks, motheringly, 'Is Bully upset?'), Fassbinder irritably brushes his arm off and abruptly leaves the room... only to shout for Armin to bring him something else a moment later. Of course, this kind of behaviour is not unfamiliar in a Fassbinder film, especially in those where he himself plays a role. But in this film it strikes the viewer differently. Within the essentially documentary framework of *Germany in Autumn*, it cannot be passed off so easily as mere role-playing.

Then, too, it is interesting to note that within the film text of *Germany in Autumn*, there is a clear parallel between Fassbinder's abrasive bullying of Armin (and his intellectual bullying of his mother) and the West German border guards' bullying of motorists in the footage shot at the frontier post (which footage, shot by someone other than Fassbinder, seems to be documentary in nature, although it could conceivably have been set up or fully staged). Thus, in the larger sense, set within *Germany in Autumn*'s sobering, meditative self-scrutiny, Fassbinder's apparently very frank dramatisation of apparently very real and deep-seated authoritarian tendencies in himself places the relations between the personal and the political in sharp perspective.

Characteristically, however, where Fassbinder is concerned, these relations are simply (or, to be more accurate, simplistically) placed in crude opposition. Ultimately, this, I think, is the greatest failure of Fassbinder. He seems almost pathologically incapable of depicting—or, apparently, of living—the relations between the personal and the political in any form other than a crude opposition. On the other hand, the greatest success of Fassbinder—as demonstrated by these sequences in *Germany in Autumn*, among other examples—seems to me to lie in his willingness, or perhaps it is an obsessive-compulsive need, to exhibit this inadequacy publicly, to hold it up for public scrutiny in film after film. Still, one would think that an individual as obviously intelligent and gifted as Fassbinder, who was able to invent ever new artistic variations on this personal inadequacy, ought also to have been able to make at least some progress

beyond the downright crude level of bullying he displays in *Germany in Autumn* (and elsewhere in his films).

But Fassbinder has given us every reason to believe that he personally identified with the characters in his films; that, in life as in his films, he found the personal and political contradictions overwhelming. Moreover, he has given us every reason to believe that, in life as in *Germany in Autumn*, he himself took refuge from his contradictions in cocaine and bullying and periodic collapses into sobs, dragging Armin (whose suicide came only months after the shooting of these sequences for *Germany in Autumn*) down with him in a whining, sobbing, self-pitying heap... which is exactly how the sequences Fassbinder contributed to *Germany in Autumn* came to an end; and which material is now strangely evocative of the circumstances in which Fassbinder's own life came to a sad, and sadly appropriate, ambiguous yet melodramatic end.

POSTSCRIPT

When dealing with Fassbinder's personal life, even the circumstances of his death would seem to require a cautionary footnote. These circumstances, from reports I have read, are indeed ambiguous, at least in the sense that, like the endings of some of his films (*The Marriage of Maria Braun* comes to mind), certain facts (like a lethal mixture of cocaine and sleeping pills being the direct cause of death) may be clear; but the evidence is lacking, or at least has not been made public, that might clarify whether the death was accidental or intentional. For example, no indication has been given, to my knowledge, of the size of the dosage of drugs Fassbinder had taken (or that were found in his system by autopsy)—which information might provide at least a clue to whether the death was accidental or intentional.

In any case, it is reported simply that Fassbinder was found dead by Juliane Lorenz, film editor, when she returned at 5.00 am, on Thursday, 10 June, 1982, to the Munich apartment she was sharing with him. It is also reported that present in another part of the apartment was director Wolf Gremm, in whose uncompleted film *Kamikaze* Fassbinder had acted. Near Fassbinder's body an open notebook was reportedly found containing notes and ideas related to film projects he was working on; and a video machine he had apparently been using was reportedly still running when his body was discovered. In any case, where the question of accidental death or suicide is concerned, I intend absolutely no moralising implication one way or another; and it is as much for the ambiguity of the circumstances as for the similarities they might bear to the ending of his *Germany in Autumn* material or to the ending of *The Marriage of Maria Braun*, that I find the circumstances of his death 'sadly appropriate'. ■

*Fassbinder was briefly married, in the early 1970s, to Ingrid Caven, an actress in his Anti-Theatre collective and subsequently in many of his films.

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Laurence Olivier has recorded the definitive King Lear
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GRANADA TELEVISION

Barthes & Film

12 SUGGESTIONS



Roland Barthes

1

BARTHES & FILM?

One reason for looking at the late Roland Barthes' writings about film is that we all tend to be much too specialised in the ways that we think about culture in general, and movies in particular. Far from being a film specialist, Barthes could even be considered somewhat *cinephobic* (to coin a term), at least for a Frenchman. Speaking to Jacques Rivette and Michel Delahaye in 1963, he confessed, 'I don't go very often to the cinema, hardly once a week'—inadvertently revealing the French passion for movies that can infect even a relative non-believer.

Cinephobic? Perhaps. He certainly mistrusted the hypnotic spell exerted by cinema, and the attendant problem, for an analyst, of having to reconcile this continuity of appeal with a discontinuity of what he called signs. Yet what he had to say about literature, theatre, photography and music (his first loves) may wind up telling us more about film than the entire output of many movie critics. And what Barthes had to say about cinema—both in general and in many specific cases—is often interesting enough in its own right.

2

MOVIE PROBLEMS

'Resistance to the cinema . . .' he wrote in the self-regarding *Roland Barthes* (1975), trying to get a fix on what he didn't like about the medium. 'Without remission, a continuum of images; the film . . . follows, like a garrulous ribbon: statutory impossibility of the fragment, of the haiku.' A lover of the fragment and the haiku, he possibly came closest to analysing a film when he devoted an essay ('The Third Meaning') to a few stills taken from Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible*. He virtually began his last book, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, with the admission that 'I decided I liked photography in opposition to the cinema, from which I none the less failed to separate it.'

Nor was this his only problem with movies. As he went on to say in *Roland Barthes*, 'Constraints of representation (analogous to the obligatory rubrics of language) make it necessary to receive everything: of a man walking in the snow, even before he signifies, everything is given to me; in writing, on the contrary, I am not obliged to see how the hero wears his nails—but if he wants to, the Text describes, and with what force, Hölderlin's filthy talons.' The trouble, in short, was that film—that 'festival of affects,' as Barthes called it—offered the spectator too much, yet not enough.

3

A LATE STARTER

Born in 1915, Barthes didn't publish his first book, *Writing Degree Zero*, until he was thirty-seven. He suffered from pulmonary tuberculosis for much of his youth, and published his first articles (1942–44) in a magazine put out by the Sanitorium des Etudiants, where he was staying much of the time. I haven't been able to track down the third of these pieces—a review of the first feature directed by Robert Bresson, *Les Anges du Péché*.

Barthes apparently didn't deal with film again until about 1954, when he started to write a series of magazine

articles that eventually became grouped together under the heading 'Mythologies'. This involved writing about all kinds of cultural activity, ranging from wrestling to striptease to tourist guides, in which films were allowed to play a significant part. In the course of developing this approach—initially with the aid of semiology, and later with the help of psychoanalysis—he constructed a critique of cinema that took shape in such essays as 'The Third Meaning' (1970) and 'Upon Leaving the Movie Theatre' (1975).

In the late 70s, not long before his death, Barthes agreed to play the novelist William Thackeray in his friend André Téchiné's film *The Brontë Sisters*. (He had earlier refused to play himself in Godard's *Alphaville* in 1965.) And after that, he even contemplated writing a film script, which Téchiné would direct, based on the life of Marcel Proust.

4

HAIR, SWEAT & SEMIOLOGY

Contemporary resistance to semiology as a dry academic pursuit can't be dealing with the spirited polemical and political use of it made by Barthes as a journalist over a quarter of a century ago, when he was defining and attacking current mythologies in the pages of *Lettres Nouvelles*. Semiology—a term and concept



first formulated by linguist Ferdinand de Saussure in the early years of this century, when he called for a 'science that studies the life of signs within society'—was in fact brought to the attention of a wide public largely through Barthes' efforts.

Inaugurating the chair of Literary Semiology at the Collège de France in the late 70s, Barthes reminded his audience that:

Semiology, so far as I am concerned, started from a strictly emotional impulse. It seemed to me (around 1954) that a science of signs might stimulate social criticism, and that Sartre, Brecht and Saussure could concur in the project. It was a question, in short, of understanding (or of describing) how a society produces stereotypes, i.e. triumphs of artifice, which it then consumes as innate meanings, i.e. triumphs of nature. Semiology (my semiology, at least) is generated by an intolerance of this mixture of bad faith and good conscience which characterises the general morality, and which Brecht, in his attack upon it, called the Great Habit.

In 'The Roman in Films' (1954), some of these stereotypes, as evidenced in Joseph L. Mankiewicz's film of *Julius Caesar*, turn out to be fairly amusing. For instance, Barthes notices that all the male characters in the film sport fringes in order to demonstrate that they are Romans:

We therefore see here the mainstream of the Spectacle—the *sign*—operating in the open. The frontal lock overwhelms one with evidence, no one can doubt that he is in Ancient Rome. And this certainty is permanent: the actors speak, act, torment themselves, debate 'questions of universal import,' without losing, thanks to this little flag displayed on their foreheads, any of their historical plausibility. Their general representativeness can even expand in complete safety, cross the ocean and the centuries, and merge into the Yankee mugs of Hollywood extras: no matter, everyone is reassured, installed in the quiet certainty of a universe without duplicity, where Romans are Romans thanks to the most legible of signs: hair on the forehead.

From this observation, Barthes goes on

to trace two intriguing 'sub-signs' in the film: (1) 'Portia and Calpurnia, woken at dead of night, have conspicuously uncombed hair,' and (2) 'all the faces' in the film 'sweat constantly', a sign of 'moral feeling'. ('To sweat is to think—which evidently rests on the postulate, appropriate to a nation of businessmen, that thought is a violent, cataclysmic operation, of which sweat is only the most benign symptom.' Hence Caesar himself, 'the object of the crime', is the only man in the film who remains dry.)

5

A GALAXY OF STARS, A PLURALITY OF TEXTS

On the subject of stars, Barthes had many intriguing things to say. Four months after his bout with *Julius Caesar*, he was decrying the excessive use of movie stars in Sacha Guitry's *Si Versailles m'était conté*:

In the final analysis, the star system is not without a kind of chicanery: it consists of popularising History by Cinema, and of glorifying Cinema by History. It's a form of barter judged useful by both powers: for instance, Georges Marchal passes a little of his erotic glory over to Louis XIV, and in return, Louis XIV surrenders a little of his monarchical glory to Georges Marchal.

Barthes went on to reproach Guitry for not taking a lesson from the costume styling of the Folies Bergère, where the forms of period dress are false but 'superbly so, with a fine contempt for accuracy and a desire to give fancy dress an epic dimension.'

The same year, he praised Charlie Chaplin as a Brechtian artist, showing 'the public its blindness by presenting at the same time a man who is blind and what is in front of him,' i.e. 'a kind of primitive proletarian, still outside Revolution' in *Modern Times*. Twenty-five years later, in a regular column he was writing for *Le Nouvel Observateur*, he expressed his fascination with an image from *Limelight*—Chaplin applying make-up in front of a mirror—as 'literally a metamorphosis, such as only mythology and entomology could speak about it.'

And a few years before that, writing about himself in the third person in *Roland Barthes*, R. B. had this to say:

As a child, he was not so fond of Chaplin's films; it was later that, without losing sight of the muddled and solacing ideology of the character, he found a kind of delight in this art at once so popular (in both senses) and so intricate; it was a *composite* art, looping together several tastes, several languages. Such artists provoke a complete kind of joy, for they afford the image of a culture that is at once differential and collective: plural. This image then functions as the third term, the subversive term of the opposition in which we are imprisoned: mass culture or high culture.

Writing poetically about the face of Greta Garbo—that mythic object *par excellence*—the same year, Barthes found that it represented a 'fragile moment when the cinema is about to draw an existential from an essential beauty, when the archetype leans towards the fascination of mortal faces, when the clarity of the flesh as essence yields its place to a lyricism of Woman.' Comparing her face to the more individualised face of Audrey Hepburn, he concluded that, 'As a language, Garbo's singularity was of the order of the concept, that of Audrey Hepburn is of the order of the substance. The face of Garbo is an Idea, that of Hepburn, an Event.' The preceding translation is by Annette Lavers. When another Barthes translator, Richard Howard, published his own version of this essay in the 60s, this formulation was updated by substituting Brigitte Bardot for Audrey Hepburn, leading to a more topical closing line: 'Garbo's face is an Idea, Bardot's a Happening.'

6

I DIDN'T KNOW THE GUN WAS CODED

There's another way of looking at Barthes and film, less poetic, that has been favoured by certain academics. This involves seeing him as a great system builder, whose famous phrase by phrase textual analysis of a novella by Balzac called *Sarrazine*, a study known as *S/Z*, breaks down 'the realist text' into 'five levels of connotation' or 'codes'. From the methodology of analysing prose narrative—which Barthes derived collectively from one of his seminars—certain film academics have tried to establish a more systematic approach in studying movies.

Without wishing to dismiss this sort of work, I can't say I've found it as useful as Barthes' more poetic and suggestive (if less systematic) writings. Maybe this is because I value his work more for its questions than its answers, and more for its art (and play) than its science (and work). In this respect, stylistically and iconoclastically, Barthes is closer to an American film critic like Manny Farber—above all, in the peculiarly *cine-matic* flux, speed and movement of his thought—than he is to fellow French



'Julius Caesar': 'The frontal lock overwhelms one with evidence'.

semiotologists like Raymond Bellour and Christian Metz.

One could also argue that the more 'teachable' an analytic approach is, the easier it becomes to apply it mechanically—as, indeed, a generation of graduate students and professors has often tended to apply *S/Z*, without much thoughtfulness or insight.

7

ART AS IMMOBILITY

Ideology is, in effect, the imaginary of an epoch, the Cinema of a society.—'Upon Leaving the Movie Theatre'.

In 1959, when the French New Wave was just beginning to make itself felt, Barthes published a critique of Claude Chabrol's first film, *Le Beau Serge*, which called it right-wing for imposing a static image of man. The same year, in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, Chabrol wrote, 'There's no such thing as a big theme and a little theme, because the smaller the theme is, the more one can give it a big treatment. The

signified nothing.'

... Chabrol, on the contrary, his realism firmly in place, invests a pathos and a moral—that is to say, whether he wills it or not, an ideology. There are no innocent stories: for the past hundred years, Literature has been struggling with this calamity. For Barthes, Chabrol's 'art of the right' always assigned meanings to human misfortunes without examining the reasons: The peasants drink. Why? Because they're very poor and have nothing to do. Why this misery, this abandon? Here the investigation stops or becomes sublimated: they are undoubtedly stupid in essence, it's their nature. One certainly isn't asking for a course in political economy on the causes of rural poverty. But an artist should acknowledge his responsibility for the terms he assigns to his explanations: there is always a moment when art immobilises the world, and the later it comes, the better. I call art of the right this fascination with immobility, which makes one describe outcomes without ever asking about, I won't say causes (art isn't deterministic), but functions.

better prepared than theatre is for a certain responsibility for forms that I've called the technique of suspended meaning. I think cinema has trouble supplying clear meanings and that, in its present state, this *shouldn't* be done. The best films (for me) are those that suspend meaning the most ... an extremely difficult operation, requiring at once great technique and total intellectual honesty. For that means disentangling oneself from all the parasite meanings ...

As a prime example of what he meant, Barthes cited Luis Buñuel's recent *The Exterminating Angel*—a brilliant comic horror film about wealthy guests who inexplicably find themselves incapable of leaving a dinner party. Here, Barthes said, meaning was deliberately suspended without becoming nonsensical or absurd, in a film that jolted one 'profoundly, beyond dogmatism, beyond doctrines.' In the vulgar but accurate sense, it was a film that 'made one think'.

A few years later, Barthes' notion of suspended meaning would develop still further into two major utopian, cultural models. In his beautiful but still untranslated *The Empire of Signs* (1970), Barthes posited Japan and its culture as a system consisting of the 'play' of 'empty' signs—a concept that was crucially to influence Noël Burch when the latter wrote his history of Japanese cinema, *To the Distant Observer*. And in *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973), this became the notion of a reader's 'bliss' as opposed to his or her 'pleasure' in reading a text—the former a discontinuity of signs akin to the experience of sexual orgasm, when meaning again becomes suspended.

9

THIS WAY, MYTH

Passing references to films in Barthes' writings form a significant part of their overall colour and texture. Describing the mythical properties of the new Citroën in 1955, he saw it 'originating from the heaven of *Metropolis*'. The same year, stirred in part by Jacques Becker's *Touchez Pas au Grisbi*, he analysed the 'coolness' of gangsters in gangster films, marvelling at the visual and nonverbal emphasis of their behaviour, which insured that:

Each man regains the ideality of a world surrendered to a purely gestural vocabulary, a world which will no longer slow down under the fetters of language: gangsters and gods do not speak, they nod, and everything is fulfilled.

The next year, writing about the myth of exoticism revealed by a documentary about the Mysterious Orient, *The Lost Continent*, he noted the various means by which Buddhism was treated as 'a higher form of Catholicism', and dryly observed that, 'Faced with anything foreign, the Established Order knows only two types of behaviour, which are both mutilating: either to acknowledge it as a Punch and Judy show, or to defuse it as a pure reflection of the West.'



'Le Beau Serge': The 'descriptive surface' of Chabrol's 'microrealism'.

truth is, truth is all that matters.' The problem about this position for Barthes was that it led to political complacency. The offhand way one looked at someone or something, he wrote, could become 'the basis for an act of sarcasm or one of tenderness, in short, a truth', but the offhand way one arrived at a theme could be a falsehood. 'What is terrible about the cinema,' he added, 'is that it makes the monstrous viable; one could even say that currently our entire avant-garde lives on this contradiction: true signs, a false meaning.'

Summing up what he liked in Chabrol's provincial melodrama as 'microrealism', Barthes compared its 'descriptive surface'—as in the gestures of children playing football in the street—with that of Flaubert. 'The difference—which is considerable—is that Flaubert never wrote a story.' Flaubert had the insight to realise that the ultimate value of his realism was its insignificance, 'that the world signified only that it

8

BUNUEL VERSUS CHABROL

Four years later, interviewed by *Cahiers du Cinéma*, Barthes pursued this notion further by evoking an art which challenged ideology by suspending meaning—a development in some ways of Brecht's ideas about alienation and New Novelist Alain Robbe-Grillet's ideas about non-humanistic art:

What I ask myself now is if there aren't arts which are more or less reactionary by their very natures and techniques. I believe that of literature; I don't believe a literature of the left would be possible. A problematic literature, yes—that is, a literature of suspended meaning: an art which provokes responses but doesn't supply them. I think literature is that in the best of cases. As for cinema, I have the impression that, in this respect, it's very close to literature, and because of its structure and material, it's a lot



'The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie': 'The painful revelation'.

10

BARTHES AND FILMS

Sometimes a particular film could goad Barthes into a major formulation. For many readers, the key passage in *The Pleasure of the Text* is a paragraph that links storytelling to the myth of Oedipus. This was written, Barthes notes at the end, after having seen F. W. Murnau's *City Girl*—a silent Hollywood film of 1929 that had just been shown on French TV. In Roland Barthes, he delighted in the 'textual treasury' of a Marx Brothers movie, *A Night at the Opera*—including 'the liner cabin, the torn contract, the final chaos of the opera decors'—as emblems of 'the logical subversions performed by the Text.' In the same book, he compared the process of his own writing to a theatre rehearsal in a film by Jacques Rivette (who, in turn, has spoken often of Barthes' influence on his own work), a rehearsal that is 'verbose, infinite ... shot through with other matters.'

Later, in *The Lover's Discourse: Fragments* (1978), he would cite a scene from Buñuel's *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*—a curtain rising 'the wrong way round—not on an intimate stage, but on the crowded theatre'—as an emblematic image for the painful revelation of commonplace information by a lover's informer about his or her beloved. And in a magazine column in 1979, he recorded his distress at an audience laughing at the very things in Eric Rohmer's *Perceval* (like the hero's simplicity) that he loved the most, and his amusement at seeing 'a very French film', Vincent, François, Paul ... and the Others, on French TV ('The stereotype here is nationalised; it forms part of the decor, not part of the story').

11

UGLY EXCESS

In 'The Third Meaning', Barthes distinguishes three levels of meaning in the stills from *Ivan the Terrible* that he examines. The first is informational, on the level of communication, to be analysed by semiology. The second is symbolic, on the level of signification, to be analysed by 'the sciences of the symbol (psychoanalysis, economy, dramaturgy).' The third, which Barthes calls the

'obtuse meaning', constitutes that surplus of meaning which can't be exhausted by the other two.

This level of 'excess' (as it has been called by film scholar Kristin Thompson) is the hardest to describe with any clarity, for most criticism, by equating a film with its story and interpretation, fails to acknowledge that this third meaning can exist on any level at all. Barthes finds it in his own subjective observations of such details as the ugliness of the character Euphrosinia, which 'exceeds the anecdote, becomes a blunting of the meaning, its deflection':

Imagine 'following' not Euphrosinia's machinations, nor even the character ... nor even, further, the countenance of the Wicked Mother, but only, in this countenance, that grimace, that black veil, the heavy, ugly dullness of that skin. You will have another temporality ... another film. A theme with neither variations nor development ... the obtuse meaning can proceed only by appearing and disappearing ...

12

ON THE WAY OUT

'Upon Leaving the Movie Theatre' begins with Barthes' description of how much he loves that curious activity, which he compares to coming out of hypnosis. Reflecting on the theatre's darkness and what it suggests to him—the 'lack of ceremony' and 'relaxation of postures'—he settles on the poetic image of the cocoon: 'The film spectator might adopt the silk worm's motto: *inclusum labor*

illustrat: because I am shut in I work, and shine with all the intensity of my desire.'

Submerged in the darkness of the theatre (an anonymous, crowded darkness: how boring and frustrating all those so-called 'private' screenings), we find the very source of the fascination exercised by film (any film). Consider, on the other hand, the opposite experience, the experience of TV, which also shows films: nothing, no fascination; the darkness is dissolved, the anonymity repressed, the space is familiar, organised (by furniture and familiar objects), tamed. Eroticism—or, better yet, in order to stress its frivolity, its incompleteness, the eroticisation of space—is foreclosed. Television condemns us to the Family, whose household utensil it has become just as the hearth once was, flanked by its predictable communal stewing pot in times past.

Linking the ideological stereotype with the still image, Barthes wonders if we all don't have 'a dual relationship with platitudes: both narcissistic and maternal,' in psychoanalytic terms. And the only way to pry oneself from the mirror (i.e., the screen) is to break 'the circle of duality ... filmic fascination' and 'loosen the glue's grip, the hypnosis of verisimilitude' that is commonly referred to as suspension of disbelief. This can be done 'by resorting to some (aural or visual) critical faculty of the spectator—isn't that what is involved in the Brechtian distancing effect?'

Yet instead of going to movies 'armed with the discourse of counter-ideology,' Barthes suggests another way. This involves letting himself become involved as if he had two bodies at once, one of them narcissistic, and the other one 'perverse', making a fetish not of the image but of what 'exceeds' it: 'The sound's grain, the theatre, the obscure mass of other bodies, the rays of light, the entrance, the exit ...' The distance with respect to the image, he concludes, is finally what fascinates us—a distance which is not so much intellectual as 'amorous' ... And despite all the numerous quarrels with cinema that Barthes maintained over a quarter of a century of writing, one suspects that many of them, in the final analysis, were a lover's quarrels, a lover's discourse. ■

The author's thanks to Stephen Heath, Michael Silverman and Bérénice Reynaud.

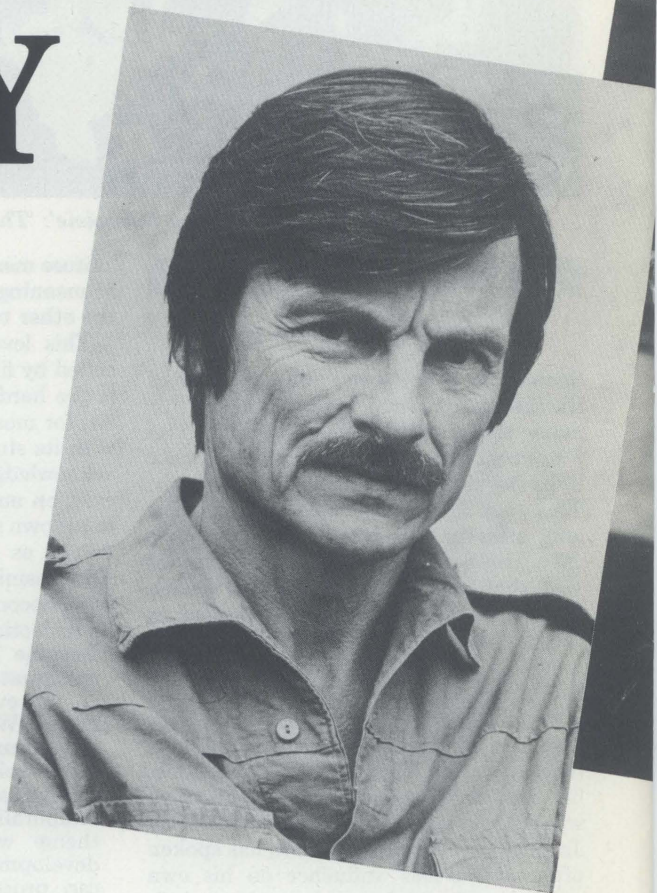


'Ivan the Terrible': The ugliness of Euphrosinia.

TARKOVSKY IN ITALY

'We've reached a time when we must declare open warfare on mediocrity, greyness and lack of expressiveness, and make creative inquiry a rule in cinema.'

BY TONY MITCHELL



Andrei Tarkovsky

'I am starting work on my new film at the end of September [1982], and I don't quite know how to cope with it,' Andrei Tarkovsky said. 'It is being produced by RAI and Gaumont, in collaboration with Sovin Film in Moscow, and it has taken three and a half years to reach the point where I am now. I already feel as if I have shot the film I don't know how many times. It's difficult to remain fresh. In Moscow I never had to think about money because I didn't have to go out looking for it; but now I know how it feels to be in that situation, and it's very difficult to remain yourself. My films have always been the films I wanted to make. I haven't experienced my Italian colleagues' terrible difficulties. In fact, though, I am working under very good conditions. My screenplay has already been drafted, so that's a thing of the past, which means I'm inclined to modify it during shooting, as I did in my last film, *Stalker*. The problem is that I have never had enough time for the editing. I hope I will this time, since it doesn't really cost anything.'

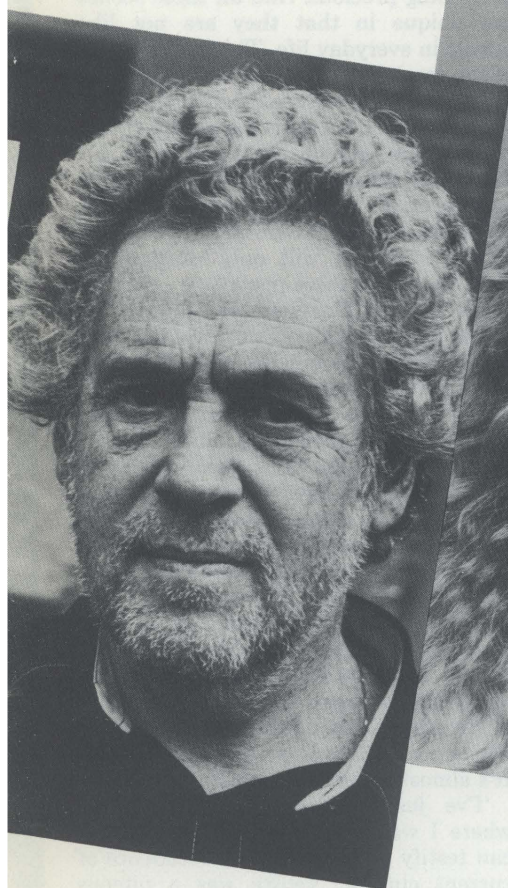
Andrei Tarkovsky's *Nostalgia*, scripted by Tonino Guerra, regular collaborator with Antonioni and more recently with Rosi, is finally under way. Using an Italian crew and the actors Oleg Yankovsky, who was in *Mirror*, Erland Josephson and Domiziana Giordano, the film is the first by a Russian director to be made for European television. It will cost some £500,000 and will be shot in colour on location in Tuscany, Florence, Pisa, Rome, Milan, Venice, Ravenna and Moscow. A spring release is planned with television screenings in 1984.

Tarkovsky describes *Nostalgia* as 'a simple love story'. Andrei Gorgiakhov (Yankovsky), a Russian university teacher, comes to Italy for the first time to see the architecture on which he has for years been lecturing. He develops an unrequited affection for his interpreter and guide (Domiziana Giordano); and he discovers a type of alter ego in Domenico (Josephson), a Tuscan professor of mathematics, who is regarded as a madman because he believes the world is coming to an end.

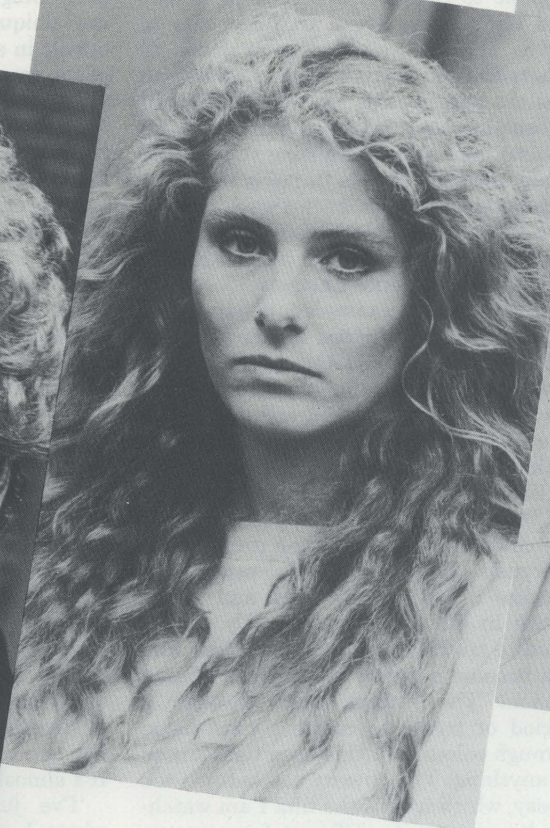
At a RAI press conference in Rome to announce the start of production, Tarkovsky had this to say: '*Nostalgia* is about the impossibility of people living

together without really knowing one another, and about the problems arising from the necessity of getting to know one another. It's very simple to make acquaintances, much more difficult to arrive at a deeper knowledge of another person. Then there is an aspect of the film which is less evident on the surface, concerning the impossibility of importing or exporting culture, of appropriating another people's culture. We Russians can claim to know Dante and Petrarch, just as you Italians can claim to know Pushkin, but this is really impossible—you have to be of the same nationality. The reproduction and distribution of culture is harmful to its essence and spreads only a superficial impression. It is not possible to teach one person the culture of another.

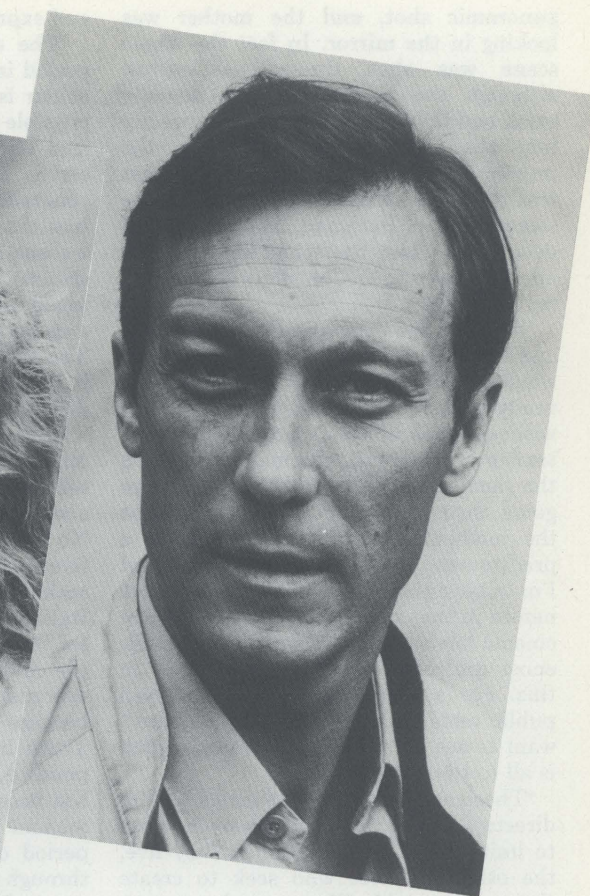
'In the film, the interpreter Eugenia asks, "What do you have to do to understand another people?" And Andrei replies, "Destroy the borders." It's a complex global problem which is either resolved on a simple level or not at all. On a simple level it can be resolved by a child, but on a more complex level it involves self-understanding. Andrei tries to unload these problems on his alter ego the madman. Andrei is searching for the truth and at times feels it is useless to teach something he doesn't know at first



Erland Josephson



Domiziana Giordano



Oleg Yankovsky

hand. In the madman he finds someone who is convinced about his actions, who claims to know how to save the world and acts accordingly. Domenico is like a defenceless child who acts without reflection, and so in a way represents what is missing in Andrei.'

The character of Domenico was inspired by a newspaper story which Guerra came across after he had already partially drafted the screenplay. It was, Tarkovsky said, a lucky find which synthesised an important aspect of the film. 'Guerra is a poet of rare talent, capable of making great discoveries. Luckily I work in the cinema, whereas he's a poet, so I don't have to envy him.' Tarkovsky had originally planned to shoot a considerable portion of the film in Moscow, but agreements with Sovin Film broke down and he had to halve the footage earmarked for the Moscow scenes. 'Destiny gave us a hand. The house we found in Tuscany is much more interesting cinematically than the Moscow locations, and I'm very glad to be able to expand this little corner of Russia in Italy.'

Does water still obsess Tarkovsky? 'Water is a mysterious element, a single molecule of which is very photogenic,' Tarkovsky said. 'It can convey movement and a sense of change and flux. There will be a lot of it in *Nostalgia*. Maybe it has subconscious echoes—perhaps my love of water arises from some atavistic

memory or some ancestral transmigration.'

Questioned about a possible conflict between the 'pessimism' of his films and the 'optimism' of the Italian way of life, and about the difficulty Italians find in understanding his films, Tarkovsky said: 'I am not without optimism. My film is, after all, a love story which is relatively simple and comprehensible. But at the same time I've tried to get to the bottom of the more profound and disturbing aspects beneath its surface. Pessimism arises from worry and the complexity of the problems one poses oneself. These problems can't simply be resolved by a joyous attitude to the world. I'm interested in characters who are worried about the state of the world, and perhaps this sometimes involves too much complexity.'

'Cinema is an art form which involves a high degree of tension, which may not generally be comprehensible. It's not that I don't want to be understood, but I can't, like Spielberg, say, make a film for the general public—I'd be mortified if I discovered I could. If you want to reach a general audience, you have to make films like *Star Wars* and *Superman* which have nothing to do with art. This doesn't mean I treat the public like idiots, but I certainly don't take pains to please them. I don't know why I'm always so defensive in front of journalists—I might need you one of these days, especially if my film gets the same kind of distribution as Angelopoulos!'

Tarkovsky expanded his ideas at the conference 'Cinema Thieves—International Intrigue' held at the Centro Palatino in Rome on 9 September 1982. He presented clips from *Seven Samurai*, *Mouchette*, *Nazarin* and *La Notte*, the films which had made the most incisive impression on him, as opposed to having influenced him.

ANDREI TARKOVSKY: 'The problem of influence, influx or reciprocal activity is complex. Cinema doesn't exist in a vacuum—one has colleagues and so influences are inevitable. So what is influence or influx? The artist's choice of the environment in which he works, the people with whom he works, is like his choice of a dish at a restaurant. As for the influence of Kurosawa, Mizoguchi, Bresson, Buñuel, Bergman and Antonioni on my work, it is not influence in the sense of "imitation"—from my point of view this would be impossible since imitation has nothing to do with the aims of cinema. One has to find one's own language through which to express oneself. To me influx means being in the company of people whom I admire and esteem.'

'If I notice that a frame or a sequence echoes another director I try to avoid it and modify the scene. This happens only very rarely, as for example in *Mirror* when I set up a frame in which the leading woman was in a room and her mother in the next. There was a close-up of the two women, although it was a

panoramic shot, and the mother was looking in the mirror. In fact the whole scene was shot through a mirror, although the mirror did not actually exist, and the woman was looking directly into the room. There was only the impression of a mirror. I realised that this type of scene could have come straight out of Bergman. None the less, I decided to shoot the scene as it was, as an acknowledgment of, or nod towards, my colleague.

'Without the directors I've mentioned, and with the addition of Dovzhenko, there wouldn't be any cinema. Everyone naturally looks for his own original style, but without these directors providing a context or background, cinema wouldn't be the same. Many film-makers seem to be going through a very difficult period at the moment. In Italy, cinema is in a predicament. My Italian colleagues, and I'm talking about some of the best-known names in the cinema, tell me that Italian cinema has ceased to exist. Cinema audiences are, of course, a major factor in this. For a long time cinema followed public taste, but now the public doesn't want to see a certain type of film, which is all to the good really.

'There are two basic categories of film directors. One consists of those who seek to imitate the world in which they live, the other of those who seek to create their own world. The second category contains the poets of the cinema, Bresson, Dovzhenko, Mizoguchi, Bergman, Buñuel and Kurosawa, the cinema's most important names. The work of these film-makers is difficult to distribute: it reflects their inner aspirations, and this always runs counter to public taste. This does not mean that the film-makers don't want to be understood by their audience. But rather that they themselves try to pick up on and understand the inner feelings of the audience.

'Despite the current plight of the cinema, film remains an art form, and every art form is specific, with a content which doesn't correspond to the essence of other forms. For example, photography can be an art form, as the genius of Cartier-Bresson shows, but it is not comparable to painting because it's not in competition with painting. The question that film-makers must ask themselves is, what distinguishes cinema from the other arts? To me cinema is unique in its dimension of time. This doesn't mean it develops in time—so do music, theatre and ballet. I mean time in the literal sense. What is a frame, the interval between "Action" and "Cut"? Film fixes reality in a sense of time—it's a way of conserving time. No other art form can fix and stop time like this. Film is a mosaic made up of time. This involves gathering elements. Imagine three or four directors or cameramen shooting the same material for an hour, each with his own particular vision. The result would be three or four totally different types of film—each person would throw out some bits and keep others and make his own film. Despite the fixing of time involved in film, the director can always elaborate his material

and express his own creativity through it.

'The cinema is going through a bad period in terms of aesthetics. Filming in colour is regarded as getting as close as possible to reality. But I look on colour as a blind alley. Every art form tries to arrive at truth and seeks a form of generalisation. Using colour is related to how one perceives the real world. Filming a scene in colour involves organising and structuring a frame, realising that all the world enclosed in this frame is in colour and making the audience aware of this. The advantage of black and white is that it is extremely expressive and it doesn't distract the audience's attention.

'You can find examples of expressive modes in colour cinema, but most directors who are aware of this problem have always tried to film in black and white. No one has succeeded in creating a different perspective in colour film or in making it as effective as black and white. Italian neo-realism is not only important for the fact that it turned a new page in the cinema by exploring the problems of everyday life, but also, essentially, because it did this in black and white. Truth in life doesn't necessarily correspond to truth in art, and now colour film has become a purely commercial phenomenon. The cinema went through a period of trying to create a new vision through colour, but this hasn't amounted to anything. The cinema has become too glossy, which means the film I am watching becomes quite different for a person sitting in the other corner.

'The film clips which I am showing represent what is closest to my heart. They are examples of a form of thought and how this thought is expressed through film. In Bresson's *Mouchette* the way in which the girl commits suicide is particularly striking. In *Seven Samurai*, in the sequence in which the youngest member of the group is afraid, we see how Kurosawa transmits this sense of fear. The boy is trembling in the grass, but we don't see him trembling, we see the grass and flowers trembling. We see a battle in the rain and when the character played by Toshiro Mifune dies we see him fall and his legs become covered with mud. He dies before our eyes.

'In Buñuel's *Nazarin*, we see the injured prostitute being helped by Nazarin and how she drinks the water from the bowl. The final sequence of Antonioni's *La Notte* is perhaps the only episode in the whole history of cinema in which a love scene became a necessity and took on the semblance of a spiritual act. It's a unique sequence in which physical closeness has great significance. The characters have exhausted their feelings for each other but are still very close to each other. As a friend of mine said once, more than five years with my husband is like incest. These characters have no exit from their closeness. We see them desperately trying to save each other, as if they were dying.

'When I start shooting, I always look at the films I like, by the directors I consider to be in "my group"—not to imitate them, but to savour their atmos-

phere. It's no accident that all the clips I'm showing are in black and white. They are important because the directors transform something close to them into something precious. And all these scenes are unique in that they are not like events in everyday life. This is the stamp of the great artist, showing us our interior world. All these scenes cater to the audience's desire by conserving beauty rather than giving enjoyment. These days it's extremely difficult to deal with this type of subject, it's almost absurd even to talk about it—no one would give you a sou. But the cinema will only continue to exist thanks to these poets.

'To make a film you need money. To write a poem all you need is pen and paper. This puts cinema at a disadvantage. But I think cinema is invincible, and I bow down to all the directors who try to realise their own films despite everything. All the films from which I've shown examples have their own rhythm. (Nowadays, it seems, most directors use rapid, short scenes, and directors who use cutting and speed are considered to be really professional.) The aim of any true director is to express truth, but what do producers care? In the 1940s, there was a survey in America ranking professions according to stress. This was at the time of Hiroshima and pilots came out on top. The second place went to film directors. It's almost a suicidal profession.

'I've just come back from Venice, where I was on the festival jury, and I can testify to the complete decadence of current cinema. Venice was a piteous spectacle. To understand and accept a film like Fassbinder's *Querelle* requires, I believe, a totally different type of spirituality. Marcel Carné obviously accepted it more than I did. I think it's a manifestation of an anti-artistic phenomenon; its concerns are sociological and sexual problems. It would have been profoundly unjust to have given the film an award simply because it was Fassbinder's last film—I think he has made much better films than this. The present crisis in cinema isn't important, however, because the arts always go through periods of crisis and then there is a revival. Just because you can't make a film doesn't mean the cinema is dead.

'At its best, cinema comes between music and poetry. It has reached as high a level as any art form. And as an art form it has consolidated itself. Antonioni's *L'Avventura* was made a long time ago, but it gives the impression of having been made today. It's a miraculous film and has not aged a bit. Perhaps it is not the sort of film one would make today but it still has that freshness. My Italian colleagues are going through a very bad period. Neo-realism and the great directors seem to have disappeared. Producers are like drug-pushers, they only want to make money, but most of them don't last long. I almost disowned the version of *Solaris* which was shown in Italy. But now the company which distributed it no longer exists, which seems to be the fate of most distributors.'

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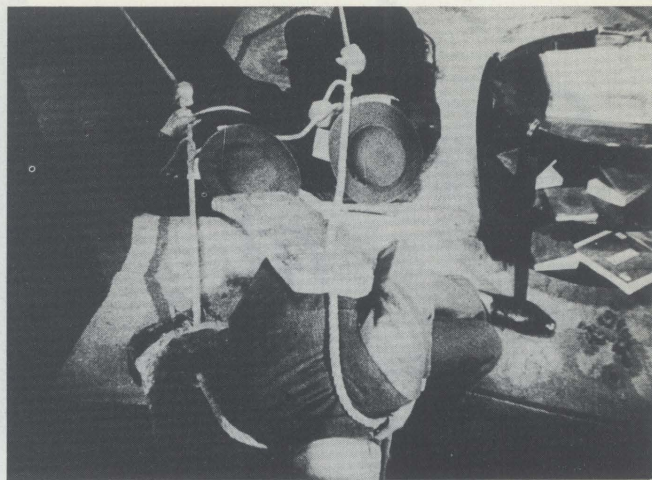
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A NOTE ON BUNUEL'S NARRATIVE

By Gilberto Perez

The power to disturb, to startle and unsettle, has been a salient characteristic of Luis Buñuel's films. A career that began in 1929, with the sliced eye at the outset of his first film, *Un Chien Andalou*, continues to this day the surrealist programme of provocation, with no signs of a falling off in late works such as *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* or *That Obscure Object of Desire*. Other film-makers have had long careers, but no other matches Buñuel's sustainment of high achievement; his work has not been all at the same level, of course, but throughout his career, in France, Mexico and in his native Spain, he has consistently made films at the level of his best. That sliced eye, as he has explained, was intended to put the spectator in a frame of mind permitting the free association of images that follows. And Buñuel has followed it, over many years, with his 'myriad of indelible images', as one critic has called them (William S. Pechter, in an excellent, little-known essay on Buñuel), 'physical manifestations of the irrational' that function, arrestingly, as 'a surrealist art's autonomous "found objects"' (*Twenty-four Times a Second*, New York, 1971, p 223).

The images are indeed powerful in themselves: dead donkeys on grand pianos, to cite another example from *Un Chien Andalou*, tied together with ropes to supine, alarmed priests and to a harness on the shoulders of a man who must haul all that encumbrance as he

approaches the woman he desires and never gets to possess; a knitting needle thrust into a keyhole, in *El*, by a husband on his honeymoon paranoiacally convinced that there's an eye on the other side spying on him and his wife; snails crawling, in *The Diary of a Chambermaid*, on the bare bloody legs of a little girl who has just been brutally raped and murdered in a wood. But the indelible impact of Buñuel's films derives less, I think, from the images taken individually than from the way they are unfolded in sequence. The autonomous 'found objects' wouldn't strike us with such force if they weren't also felt somehow to belong one after another in just the succession Buñuel has contrived for them. He has an unusual gift for visual narrative, and although this gift hasn't been properly recognised—no doubt because it's difficult to explain why so many things in Buñuel are apparently arbitrary yet feel just right—I believe that it accounts, more than anything else, for the unique power of his work.

By 'visual narrative' I don't mean the stories he tells so much as his manner of telling them, of unfolding before our eyes a succession of objects, aspects and incidents. Through some aberration of judgment, narrative is held in disdain, thought to be intrinsically commercial and retrograde, among certain champions of film modernism; ignoring the great variety of possibilities that narrative offers, whether its medium be literature or film, these people seem to equate it across the board with the most hackneyed procedures of Hollywood. Thus, in the course of an interesting and generally perceptive discussion of Buñuel's work, Jean-André Fieschi declares that Buñuel's 'cinema of manifold fictions is not a narrative cinema' (*Cinema: A Critical Dictionary*, editor Richard Roud, London/New York, 1980, p 168). I don't see what else it is, provided one conceives narrative as broadly as it must be to encompass such diverse instances of the

art as the *Odyssey* and *Ulysses*, the *Divine Comedy* and *Mother Courage*, *October* and *Eclipse*. Although *Un Chien Andalou* opens with the title 'Once upon a time,' which calls to mind the traditional enchantments of storytelling, Buñuel's procedure, in that film and subsequently, has been continually to violate any expectations of such enchantments the spectator may harbour: 'Once upon a time,' and within a few moments a woman's eye is meticulously sliced with a razor. Buñuel's narrative is an articulation of the disconcerting, a parcelling out of the irrational so that it comes to seem unassailable, an investing of the illogical, the free-associative, with a rigorous logic of its own.

The impact of the dead donkeys, grand pianos and priests, to look further into that example, has much to do with the sequence in which Buñuel presents them. In the room where that scene takes place, the woman is in a corner and the man lasciviously advancing towards her when he picks up from the floor two ropes attached to something behind him, which he starts pulling forward with great exertion. For a calculated moment, Buñuel postpones disclosing that very weighty haul; then, instead of following the order in which things are lined up behind the man, he suddenly shows us first the last and worst part, the bloody decaying donkeys on the pianos all the way at the back; after which the priests being dragged along the floor come rather as an amused afterthought. The effect here depends both on the shocking nature of the things presented and on the rhythm of their presentation. From the postponement that enhances our curiosity we are taken straight to the strongest note, and then to a milder addition that seems to be saying: and this too, as if that other weight were not enough to have to drag.

Buñuel has always discouraged anyone seeking to explicate this film, which was made deliberately in defiance of sense: nothing in it, he has stressed, symbolises



DISCONCERTING

anything. When he and his then collaborator Salvador Dalí were at work on the script, which they based on their dreams, they took care to leave out anything they thought might be amenable to understanding. *Un Chien Andalou* was conceived to have been as nonsensical as its title, which refers to nothing whatsoever in it; and indeed it challenges any attempt to interpret it, any meaning one may venture to read into its imagery. None the less it achieves, in the finished form Buñuel gave it, a strange commanding coherence as a picture of the unconscious fervently striving toward the object of desire and repeatedly failing to attain it. Even if no precise significance can be assigned to the weight holding the protagonist back in his pursuit of the woman, surely that stands for, in some unclear yet incontrovertible fashion, the baggage in his mind that thwarts him from gaining sexual satisfaction.

Fieschi rightly contrasts the film with *Entr'acte*, for *Un Chien Andalou*, in 'the unflinching logic of its progression', has nothing of the whimsical or capricious about it. First seen riding a bicycle along an almost empty street, the protagonist a little later becomes connected, in the progress of the film's weird logic, with an androgynous woman looking much like him who attracts a crowd on that street because of a severed hand she's toying with. The severed hand suggests castration, and in the context of this film—which includes such other suggestions of castration as a later scene in which the protagonist's hand gets caught in a door being aggressively shut—so does the fact that the woman in the street, who has been standing erect in the middle of it, is run over by a car. It's when the man sees that feminine semblance of himself levelled to the ground that he turns sexually eager toward the woman in the room, who had previously been to him a sort of mother figure. I'll heed Buñuel's advice and try not to interpret too closely, but here, as in our most intriguing dreams,

interpretation seems to be called for even as it is resisted.

Un Chien Andalou is the definitive dream film, at once unreal and bluntly vivid, like an apparition that carries all the conviction of flesh and blood: perhaps the most eloquent realisation there is of the surrealist aim to merge fantasy and reality into an indissoluble whole. Buñuel's mastery of narrative is already fully evident in this initial work, which moves freely in time and space and yet manages its abruptly dislocating transitions with remarkable smoothness. While delving into the realm of the mind, it invests that realm with all the solidity and continuity one could ask for in a detailed realistic rendition of an actual setting.

It makes ample use of the 'eye-line match'—the cut on a character's glance to what he's looking at shown more or less from his point of view—and other techniques to establish continuity from one shot to the next that were at that time only beginning to become conventional in Hollywood. And it applies these techniques in the course of pursuing a strategy of unremitting disorientation quite foreign to Hollywood practice: *Un Chien Andalou* is at the same time as smooth and as disruptive as possible. An eye-line match leads us from the protagonist's perplexed stare to a point-of-view shot, through his eyes, of ants crawling out of a hole in the palm of his hand, an image of itching desire mingled with revulsion Dalí was later to use in his painting. When the protagonist fires two pistols at his alter ego, a sort of father figure, that man begins to fall in a room and seems to continue falling in another place altogether, a field, as if there had been no interruption, because Buñuel cunningly makes the transition from one place to the other just at the point in the man's fall when his forward movement starts to turn downward.

One commentator, Keith Cohen, has misguidedly offered this film as an illus-

tration of the continuity he thinks is inherent in the film medium, wrongly supposing that Buñuel intended the utmost abruptness and that the medium defeated that intention of its own accord (*Film and Fiction*, New Haven, 1979, p 81). But the smoothness of *Un Chien Andalou*, as anybody who has tried his hand at editing film must know, has nothing to do with any quality presumed to inhere in the medium: it was the result of a calculated and highly skilful technique. (A common and quite mistaken notion, which both Pechter and Fieschi argue against, has it that Buñuel doesn't much care about matters of form and technique, whereas in truth he has been, from the beginning, one of the great masters of film form.) Most of all, it is the gliding continuity Buñuel achieves in the face of startling discontinuities that makes *Un Chien Andalou* so successful an evocation of the experience of a dream. *Un Chien Andalou* has the disjointedness of a dream and also the flow, the flow that gives us the feeling of an inexorably unfolding logic of the illogical: a thread of the unconscious linking the dislocated pieces together and lending an odd, irrefutable authority to the ensemble.

Buñuel's documentary of 1932, *Land without Bread*, in my opinion probably the best ever made, has much in common with the films of the mind that preceded it. The reality it documents, that of an astonishingly backward region of Spain, exhibits in itself the quality of an endless nightmare in which the unfortunate inhabitants of that region have found themselves trapped for generations. Why don't they get out of that hopelessly inhospitable place, the film tacitly yet insistently asks. Although the region is isolated, it wouldn't be so very difficult for them physically to leave: they are not trapped by the geography but by deep-seated habits of life, entrenched communal traditions that, as if carrying out



'Land without Bread': another tourist spot.



'Los Olvidados': blind blows.

some grotesque parody of human society, have reduced them to total wretchedness. Their collective mentality may be compared to the protagonist's psyche in *Un Chien Andalou*: like them, he fails to gain release from inhibiting forces deep within himself. *Land without Bread* is the terrible reverse of *Nanook of the North*: whereas Flaherty's documentary celebrates the Eskimo in his ability to cope successfully with an adverse environment, Buñuel's portrays a group of human beings whose attempts to deal with harsh circumstances only manage, in a vicious circle, to make matters worse.

Moreover, *Land without Bread* provokes us not only with the extremity of its subject matter but also with its method of depiction, which involves one of Buñuel's boldest narrative moves: an incongruous juxtaposition in the surrealist manner serves here as the formative principle for the entire film. Throughout this film Buñuel adopts a style of presentation that is pointedly, shockingly at odds with the content: the style of an offhanded, relaxed travelogue. Both in the voice-over narration, which is inane on purpose, and in the briskly casual camerawork and editing, *Land without Bread* proceeds in the same fashion, and adopts the same kind of tone toward its subject, as the type of documentary that takes us to some exotic locale and notes its picturesque aspects and the peculiar customs of its inhabitants: the film treats that miserable region as if it were just another interesting tourist spot.

The charged tension thus set up between style and content leads to a complex response. By not being allowed simply to feel sorry for those unfortunates—that, Buñuel implies, would be too easy and sentimental an outlet for our emotions—we are made to confront all the more the everyday horror of life as lived in that region and to examine our own relation to the things depicted. We oscillate between compassion and an uncomfortable laughter; we recognise, through the declared inappropriateness

of the style to the subject, that no style could possibly be appropriate to present that subject; we are brought to reflect that our own situation, much better than the one displayed on the screen, of course, may be similar to it in our surrendering to implanted patterns that inhibit a proper attainment of our humanity. Why don't we get out, we may well ask ourselves, of the entrapments in our own lives? Buñuel turns this document of an exceptionally dismal case into an incisive general statement on the human situation.

The vicious circle etched in *Land without Bread*, the bad state of affairs compounded by bad habits of mind, has been a governing figure in Buñuel's films. In his Mexican masterpieces of the 50s, *Los Olvidados*, *El* and *Nazarin*, the characters find themselves stuck in quagmires brought on by a combination, in varying degrees, of dominant circumstances and self-defeating behaviour. Again and again in *Los Olvidados*, the poor strike at one another, or at such harmless targets as chickens, for lack of any accessible deserving target these outcasts on the outskirts of Mexico City can strike at. *Palos de ciego* ('a blind man's blows') is a Spanish saying aptly cited by Octavio Paz in connection with this film (*Las Peras del Olmo*, Mexico, 1965, p 233). In *Los Olvidados* only one character is literally blind but all deliver blows blindly, feeling they must hit something and hitting, to their own damage, whatever lies close at hand.

Buñuel was worried that the ostensible naturalism of this film, which marked his comeback as a major director after a hiatus of almost two decades following *Land without Bread*, would be regarded as a commercial betrayal of surrealism. And yet *Los Olvidados* is one of his foremost achievements, true to the surrealist spirit not only in the dream sequences it contains but also, and above all, in the hallucinatory progression of its narrative, built on a pattern of continual recurrences and coincidences that evokes

the sense of an implacable circularity and perfectly expresses what may be called the disastrous incestuousness of slum life. The street boys and other slum dwellers who populate *Los Olvidados* are thrown together within the confines of a world, as Paz described it, 'closed in on itself, where all actions are circular and all steps lead us back to our point of departure. Nobody can escape from there, or from himself, unless by the long street of death. [As it draws to its conclusion, the film gives us a haunting image of that long street.] Chance, which in other worlds opens doors, here closes them.' If one takes the film at the face value of naturalism, it would seem nothing but a run of bad luck that the characters keep crossing one another's paths in a chain of chance encounters that makes things worse and worse. But chance, in the role Buñuel gives it as a structuring principle in the narrative, comes to assume here the aspect of a nightmarish necessity, and those blind blows acquire the inevitability of a refrain, a brutally sombre motif.

As another example of Buñuel's narrative, consider a sequence from *The Diary of a Chambermaid*, made in 1964. This film may be said to have begun Buñuel's late period, during which he has worked mostly in France and with better financial backing than in former years. It is interesting to note that the film is set in France around 1930, in the country and at the time of his first films and his initial involvement with surrealism; there is an explicit reference to that fact at the end, when fascist demonstrators take up and shout, in admiring chorus, the name of the Paris chief of police responsible for banning, in 1930, Buñuel's second film, the enduringly outrageous *L'Age d'Or*.

About midway through *The Diary of a Chambermaid*, the chambermaid's employer, an elderly provincial gentleman, dies in his bed. This man was a foot fetishist, and he had derived especial enjoyment the previous evening from



'Diary of a Chambermaid': gamekeeper and maid.



Jeanne Moreau (the maid) with Luis Buñuel.

having the maid wear a certain pair of shoes and walk around in them, making them come alive for him; he took the shoes with him when he went to bed. In the morning the chambermaid finds his room locked, gets no answer when she knocks, and calls for help. Two men in the country house—the old man's son-in-law and a rather preposterous priest who happens to be visiting—attempt to break into the room through different doors, and Buñuel shows us in turn the banging at each door, the two men both appearing, each in his own way, somewhat laughable in their exertions. Before either breaks in, however, Buñuel cuts inside the room to a shot in which the camera, as if suddenly freed in every way from such physical constraints as locked doors impose, glides around the room, takes in the old man's bare feet resting on pillows, and smoothly moves up to his face, sunk amid sheets next to the beloved shoes he clutches forever.

This is an extraordinary shot, not mainly for the jolt of what it shows but for the place at which it comes, and the function it fulfils, in the narrative sequence Buñuel has arranged. Coming after the frustrations, the thwarting of human striving, exemplified by the banging at closed doors, the camera's sudden free flow registers as a release. Frustration has been a central theme all through Buñuel's work, as it is an inescapable presence in our lives. Noting the 'ubiquitous fetishism' of the world Buñuel depicts, Pechter cogently argued that in such a world, which is recognisably ours, the fetish constitutes 'a perfect physical manifestation of the principle of functionless or dislocated energy around which that world revolves and of the harvest of frustration in which that principle has its issue. For what is the foot fetish but an instance of the concentration of the most fundamental human energy and desire on an object in which there can be found no truly satisfactory consummation...'

The sense of release conveyed by the

effortlessly moving camera has grim connotations, for it implies that the pitiable old man could find escape from his frustrations only in death. But at least his death seems to have been a blissful one: the shoes, one would gather, finally provided him with as much satisfaction as, under the circumstances, he could hope for. Along with the grimness, one senses in Buñuel's presentation of this scene a detached yet unmistakable compassion. By showing us, through the camera's gentle glide, the dead old fetishist alone in his room, apart from any of the other characters who are about to break in, Buñuel tactfully holds in suspension, fends off for an extra moment against the intrusion of outsiders, the privacy of the old man's death.

Although it has received relatively little attention among Buñuel's films, *The Diary of a Chambermaid* seems to me one of his major creations; he has done nothing better as an architect of visual narrative. The scene discussed I hope illustrates the complex, haunting impact generated in this film by his way of arranging images in an uncommon, telling progression. And there are also the parallels he impresses in our minds through a kind of visual rhyming, such as between the old man's death and that of the little girl in the wood, both of which, he suggests, have resulted from the prevalent corruption; or his omission of things we would have expected and his inclusion of the unexpected; or his pacing, swift for the most part but at times allowing pauses to dwell on such apparently incidental yet revealing and pattern-forming details as the son-in-law's strenuous chopping of wood (akin to the later banging at doors) while the priest arrives for his visit.

Other notable illustrations of Buñuel's narrative mastery are the astounding endings to several of his films. In *L'Age d'Or*, *El Nazarin*, *Viridiana*, *That Obscure Object of Desire*, he boldly takes us by surprise with a new twist coming right at the end, nothing we would ever

have predicted but not a gratuitous or merely perverse appendage either: on the contrary, each of these final developments, once experienced, asserts itself as an unerringly fitting conclusion. The ending of *The Diary of a Chambermaid* belongs in their company. In one more instance of the recurring chronicle of human failure Buñuel's films have provided, the chambermaid, who started out as the detached outsider to the corruptions of the provincial bourgeoisie, ends up married to a man of that class and mired in that world: a man not very different from the bestial fascist gamekeeper whom she has sought to bring to justice, without success as it turns out, for raping and murdering the little girl. Then we see the gamekeeper, scot-free and successful at a café he's opened in Cherbourg with a woman he has presumably married. (He had proposed marriage to the maid because he thought a pretty woman would be requisite to the proper running of the café; she had shammed acceptance so as to be better able to incriminate him for the rape and murder he had committed. Well, he got what he wanted.)

It's the gamekeeper who, when the fascist demonstrators pass before his café, starts shouting the name of Buñuel's detested police chief. As the procession of fascists moves on down the street, Buñuel shows their advance from a fixed camera position, but with several jump cuts abruptly skipping forward in time, so that the demonstrators appear to proceed in a series of sudden fits. Thus presented, their advance strikes us like a series of gunshots: they seem to be propelled forward by some mechanistically insane, some overpowering, murderous impulse, and somehow to issue inevitably from the bourgeois decadence Buñuel has been depicting. This is an exact and fearful evocation of the forces that led to the rise of fascism in Europe, and Buñuel caps it, in the film's closing image, by moving the camera up to a stormy, ominous sky.



'Le Beau Mariage': Arielle Dombasle and Béatrice Romand.

Sense and Sensibility

Le Beau Mariage/Tom Milne

'Can we ever refrain/From building Castles in Spain?' asks the subtitle borrowed from La Fontaine's *Fables* for the second in Eric Rohmer's series of 'Comédies et Proverbes'. Probably not, but then most of us choose to keep our castles secret in dread anticipation of collapse. About a girl who impulsively decides to marry, picks out a suitable mate in the conviction that he finds her equally eligible, and then suffers agonies of humiliation when she discovers that he does not, *Le Beau Mariage* (Gala) would be unbearably cruel to watch were it not a Rohmer film.

It isn't just that as usual he flatters the eye with some deceptively anodyne images—wonderful shots of the old town of Le Mans that immediately establish its temper, as others of landscapes glimpsed from moving cars and trains contemplate its geographical, cultural and emotional distance from Paris—while the ear is busily occupied listening to his characters as usual working out their tangential problematics in a non-stop stream of conversation. He also digs deep enough to demonstrate a foundation, laid by instinct rather than artifice, to the castle so airily built by Sabine (Béatrice Romand).

Twenty-five years old, currently completing a thesis for a degree in art history and tired of sleeping around, Sabine reluctantly attends a wedding reception. There she is introduced to Edmond (André Dussollier), a 35-year-old lawyer, and for a moment there is magic, the sort of suspension of time that isolates two people in a crowded room, interrupted bare seconds later by a telephone call that summons him away on business. And when they meet later at her insistence, since he is the husband she had

already decided she must have, another invisible barrier, this one erected by the all too obvious glint in her eye, is keeping them apart not from other people but from each other.

Yet that moment of eternity, dissolved in an instant, haunts the film until it resurfaces in Edmond's sheepish confession that he is attracted, only he is resolved not to marry for the present. Immovable object meeting immovable object, their contradictory resolutions, with each reserving the right to choose, would probably emerge as little more than a convenient aid to intellectual *marivaudage* were it not that the impulse behind them is illuminated by a wealth of delicately satirical social observation.

The obvious reference point is Jane Austen, and *Emma* in particular, with Clarisse (Arielle Dombasle)—as Sabine's best friend and Edmond's cousin, the architect of their initial encounter—standing in for the Austen heroine who diverts herself by doing a little match-making but tiresomely gets it all wrong. Clarisse, if that moment of magic which she defines as *le coup de foudre* is to be credited, actually gets it right; and it is left to poor Sabine, tiresomely, to blunder.

Her first mistake, inspired by some perverted imp of women's lib, is that as a thoroughly modern ms, she sees liberation in terms of the leisured grace of the 19th century miss. No accident that she shuttles between the cobbled streets of Le Mans and the busy highways of Paris, since the freedom of choice that proclaims her as belonging to the latter sends her straight back to the confines of the former.

What Sabine is after, in fact, as she freely admits to Clarisse—who is dis-

tinctly upper as compared to her own middle class—is a spot of social climbing. Not so much out of snobbery as because, tired of being dependent on the whims of married lovers, hating the commerce of the antique shop where she works part time, fed up with settling for posters stuck on the wall to satisfy her aesthetic connoisseurship, she wants to enjoy some gracious living and she wants it now. Her logic is impeccable. Noting that Clarisse is comfortable in her milieu, she complains of being uncomfortable in hers. Envyng Clarisse her talent as a painter, she feels her own lack of creativity must be rectified, 'if only by creating a child'. And since Clarisse boasts a suitable husband whom she loves, might it not be reasonable to suppose that some of this bliss might be hers for the asking in the person of the equally suitable Edmond?

But what Sabine fails to recognise is that Clarisse is 'comfortable in her milieu' precisely because she accepts its confines. With her husband a medical student following in her doctor father's footsteps, and with her private studio-boutique where she turns out hand-painted lampshades, Clarisse is the epitome of the well-bred daughter of the upper middle class, marrying suitably and suitably engaged in a career which might be considered a mere pastime. Choice has little to do with it.

Paradoxically, therefore, Sabine is in fact supremely comfortable in her milieu so long as she is exercising the prerogative of choosing to claw her way out of it. The discomfort comes when she has to meet Edmond suitably on his level, a point succinctly made in the scene where Sabine, mainly to provide an excuse for seeing him again, lures Edmond to a country mansion where he may be able to acquire the item of Jersey porcelain in which he had expressed casual interest. As aesthete and antiquary, Sabine lovingly admires the piece. Very *grande dame* in her elegant drawing-room, the elderly owner smiles pityingly: 'We used to think of it as shoddy junk.' And Edmond simply smiles. Here—pitilessly signposted by the old lady's aristocratic refusal to budge on price, with her smiling claim that 'Bargaining isn't really my forte' extracting an irrepressibly bourgeois 'Nor mine!' from Sabine—a social abyss begins to loom which is completed by the spectacle of Edmond uneasily trying to fit himself into the context of Sabine's disco-style birthday party.

A *conte cruel*, therefore, but an entrancing one, and it was perhaps high time that one of the delightful women who have led Rohmer's heroes such a teasing dance was put in her place. Béatrice Romand, you may remember, played the 16-year-old minx who led Jean-Claude Brialy up the garden path in *Le Genou de Claire*, finally leaving him prostrate (if secretly relieved) by her revelation that her interest in him was as a father substitute. Now, twelve years later, she gets her comeuppance, giving another impeccable performance in the process. □

E.T. cetera

E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial/Gilbert Adair

Several years ago, the BBC screened an imported American situation comedy series entitled *Bewitched*. It starred Elizabeth Montgomery, Dick York and Agnes Moorehead, and chronicled the misadventures of a middle-class junior executive type who had unwittingly married a witch. Aside from one episode which has stubbornly lodged itself in my memory, it was, as I recall, a feeble, undistinguished show. The episode I refer to centred around a prodigious, though mass-produced, doll or puppet or golliwog which, merely when touched, induced in its handler an ineffable, incommunicable sense of well-being. E.T. is just such a golliwog.

Critics would come back from last year's Cannes festival, where the movie received its world premiere, critics of every conceivable theoretical cast, and they would brief you on the Antonioni, the Godard, Syberberg's *Parsifal* and that intriguing little Rumanian film in the *marché*... and when in conclusion, just for a laugh, you enquired almost shamefacedly about Spielberg's *E.T.* (UIP) an amazing transformation would occur. Our critic would go all soft, boneless, limp as a rag. He might even emit an audible coo, like a doting relative peering into a newborn's cot. Robert Kramer, than whom it would be hard to name a director with a sensibility less attuned to Spielberg's, feelingly described in an interview his wonderment, a wonderment at first reluctantly assumed, at the film's capacity to generate happiness. And *this*—not its unprecedented commercial success, allegedly enriching Spielberg to the tune of \$1m a day, not the \$750m lawsuit brought against him for plagiarism (a grotesque claim, on the face of it, since anyone who has ever improvised a bedtime story for a child might consider himself as justified in suing), not the ubiquitous dolls, Christmas cards, teeshirts and cute bars of soap—is the real *E.T.* phenomenon.

However, like the golliwog in *Bewitched*, like the ineffable in general, it defies criticism. No, let me rephrase that: *E.T.* can of course be criticised, indeed it all but invites an unholy alliance of impressionistic, genre, sociological, auteurist and structuralist analyses. Except that, as we are dealing with a film to which one shamelessly capitulates, or does not, which draws laughter and tears as 'naturally' as hot and cold water can be drawn from the corresponding taps, or does not, subjecting it to a close analysis would be like performing upon it the same operation as threatens E.T. himself. Comparisons with *Peter Pan*, though apt, do not go nearly far enough. Barrie's masterpiece, like all deeply felt expressions of nostalgia, is shot through with remorse, regret and melancholy (which in

this case, as we know, concealed an acute sexual self-loathing). *E.T.*, on the other hand, might be said to have been directed by Peter Pan. Since Spielberg has contrived to preserve intact, and without that sense of alienation from which Barrie suffered, a genuinely child-like idealism, the film's dominant mode of 'suburban pastoral', exemplified by the magical shot of a Los Angeles street corner criss-crossed by Halloween night apparitions, reflects what is clearly a lived experience, one uncontaminated by wistfulness. Rather than *Peter Pan*, the work it evokes (bearing in mind that children these days, from whatever age group, are infinitely more sophisticated than their Edwardian predecessors) is Daisy Ashford's *The Young Visitors*, prefaced by Barrie and written by its precocious authoress at the age of six. Now what purpose could possibly be served by analysing Daisy Ashford?

Yet, however sceptical as to the ultimate value of such an exercise, I have after all been commissioned to review *E.T.* What is there to say?

Well, one might mention Spielberg's version of the 'other'—here a benign, angelically sexless creature, whose visitation incorporates elements from the iconographies of the Annunciation and the Nativity; who, though capable of performing miracles, nevertheless remains dependent upon human protection from human aggression; who 'dies' only to be resurrected; and whose physical appearance suggests both the prematurely ageing astronaut in *2001* and the cosmic embryo into which he is metamorphosed. As already hinted at by the quasi-

religious vibrations given off by *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, Spielberg would seem to be groping towards a virtual theology of space, space as Heaven, offering solace to a world which has foolishly renounced its traditional God but still aches to extend its own spiritual frontiers. Which means, now purely in genre terms, that he can dispense with the cumbersome hardware of more 'naturalistic' science fiction. *E.T.*'s spacecraft resembles nothing so much as the flying saucer of comic strip convention, while the whimsical contraption he rigs up so as to beam an SOS message back to his native planet would have struck one as perfunctory in a Méliès short. In fact, save for its ludic applications, technology is made the exclusive preserve of what, in *E.T.*, subsists of the malignant 'other': the adult. Etc. (This could go on for pages.)

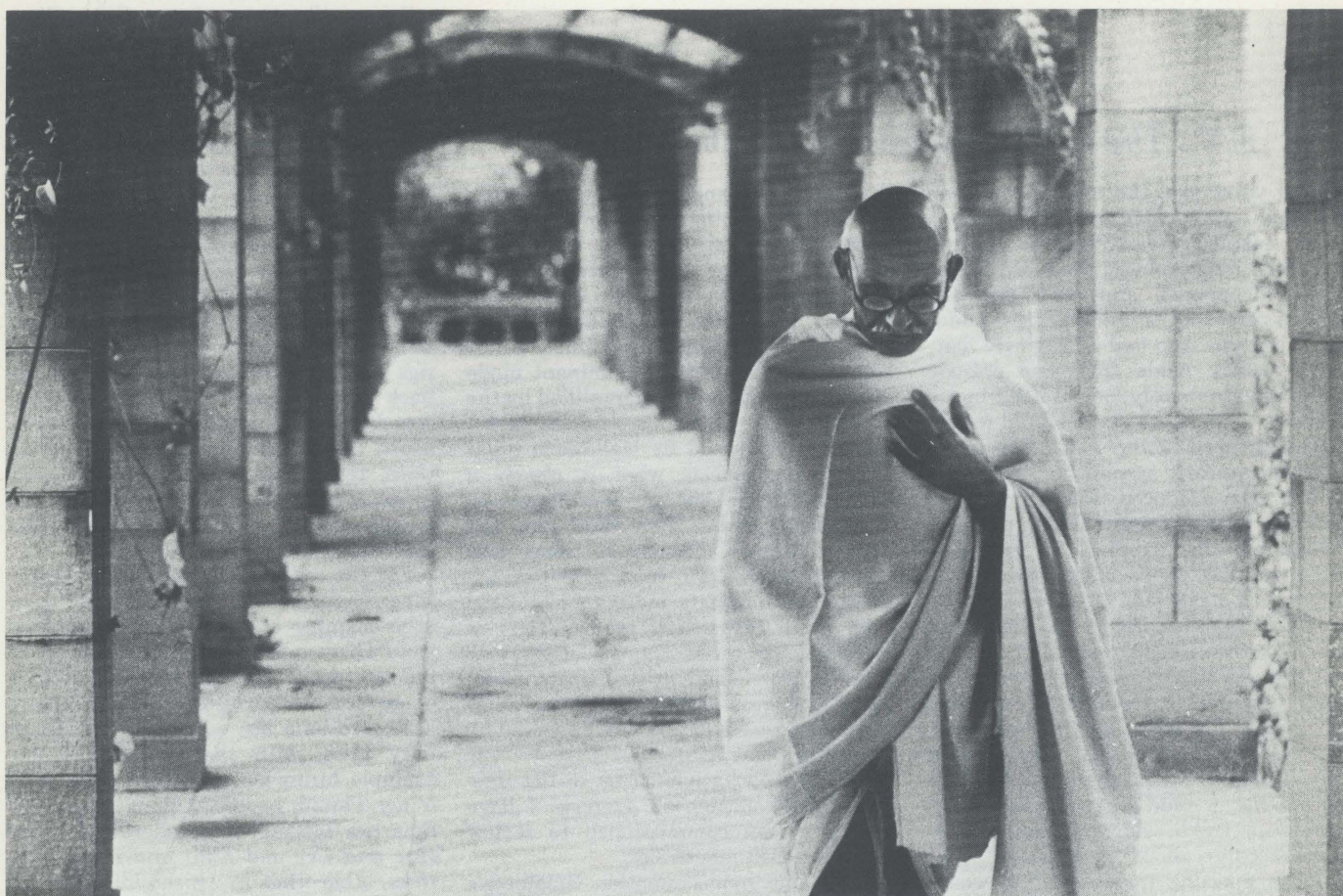
For the critic whose forte is the localising of sources and influences, *E.T.* is an echo chamber of allusive reverberations: from Disney, of course, particularly in the nocturnal sequences with which it opens and whose visuals are as densely animated as a 30s cartoon; from classic fairy tales, with the boy Elliott, for example, luring his newly befriended Hop o' my Thumb to safety along a spoor of Smarties instead of breadcrumbs; from *Hue and Cry* and *Emil and the Detectives*, other films in which children gleefully join forces to thwart injustice; from Hitchcock; from Spielberg's own work, via a few not-so-private jokes. Etc.

As to the empiricist, crawling over the film's surface like a fly on a table-top, he would doubtless note that, though enlivened by a number of brilliant sight gags (e.g. Elliott's mystified dog padding behind E.T. in the kitchen, then abruptly switching to the wheedling, tail-wagging posture of pet with master when E.T. opens the refrigerator door), its narrative construction is sometimes surprisingly clumsy. Elliott's empathetic affinity with E.T. (his name is also book-ended by *E* and *T*) is so cavalierly introduced that one spends most of the classroom scene, in which he becomes tipsy by remote control, endeavouring to work out just what is happening. Nor does Spielberg ever bother to devise a convincing physiological (or psychosomatic) reason for E.T.'s false death; and his resuscitation, when divested of its Biblical overtones, appears to be a case of taking twenty tear-sodden pages to kill off Little Nell, so to speak, and applying artificial respiration on the twenty-first. Then there is the—

But beside the film's boundless, airy, galactic charm such flaws pale into insignificance. And I recall, euphoric on the bus home after the screening, thinking of another bus, this time on film, and a gnomic conversation in which a trio of passengers were engaged. 'Qui est-ce donc qui s'amuse à tourner en dérision l'humanité?' the first passenger asked. 'Oui, qui nous manœuvre en douce?' the second piped up. Let us revise the answer. 'E.T., probablement.' □



Elliott's friend.



'Gandhi': Mahatma Gandhi (Ben Kingsley). Photo, Frank Connor.

Bapu Gandhi/Andrew Robinson

Richard Attenborough's 20-year gamble on a film of the life of Mahatma Gandhi measures up to its subject and breathes new life into film biography. *Gandhi* (Columbia-EMI-Warner) celebrates a fearless individual, the oddest of leaders, who was also a bundle of contradictions wrapped up in a dhoti and shawl. It captures the essence of his lifelong 'experiments with truth', the driving force of a life dedicated to non-violence that spanned and interacted with violence on an unprecedented world scale, the break-up of the British Empire and the emergence of a new nation. Gandhi said frequently: 'My life is my message.' Attenborough and Ben Kingsley have created a sparkling visual translation of that message, with a fidelity and lack of pretension born of long devotion.

Attenborough's quest is detailed with the use of stills and historical material in *In Search of Gandhi* (Bodley Head, £9.95). He movingly describes his original inspiration of 1962 confronting the endless problems that had to be faced to make such an epic; a testimony to the power of Gandhi's ideas to excite a group of individuals far removed in time and place from their original context. After discussion with an unknown Indian, a man called Motilal Kothari with whom he touted the project until his death in 1970, Attenborough read Louis Fischer's

Life of Gandhi, was 'inexplicably drawn to it', and hooked on a film. A childhood association with refugee victims of the Spanish Civil War helps explain his attraction to the subject, but it is difficult to be more specific than that. Personal experience of India in any form had no part in it. One comment of Gandhi's in South Africa compelled his attention early on: 'It has always been a mystery to me how men can feel themselves honoured by the humiliation of their fellow beings.'

Mountbatten, the last Viceroy of India, immediately took up the project and discussed the idea with Prime Minister Nehru in India. During Attenborough's subsequent visit, a comment by Nehru became the 'touchstone' through the gestation of the film: 'Whatever you do, don't deify him. He was too great a man for that.' He thought Gandhi would have 'laughed a great deal' at the idea of an English actor playing him. Attenborough stumbled on Ben Kingsley at a late stage by a stroke of luck. Besides being half-Indian, Kingsley—an experienced stage actor—gave a screen test with 'a credibility and magnetism that we could scarcely have contemplated.'

Attenborough and his scriptwriter John Briley have attempted a daunting task in compressing into some three hours the sweep of historical events and

the diversity of experience in which Gandhi was personally involved, while retaining his underlying unity of purpose. Attenborough agonises over what and who to leave out: 'Lord God forgive me please, but what I have to say does not permit me to do this particular thing. I shall treat all the elements as properly and honestly as I can, but there will be shortcomings.' Omitted influences and episodes include Gandhi's youth in a small princely state and his three years training as a barrister in London, where he abandoned an attempt to become an English gentleman and was converted to vegetarianism. In South Africa his first-hand acquaintance with British brutality to the Zulus is left unrecorded, as is his unpopular recruiting for the British in 1918. So is his fraught relationship with his dissolute eldest son throughout his life, and the attitudes of the rest of his children. His part in the growth of the Nationalist Movement and the manoeuvring of leaders in the 1930s, followed by his crisis of conscience over Indian involvement in the Second World War, are barely implied.

The assassination of Gandhi by a fanatical Hindu in 1948 opens and closes the film, along with his tumultuous funeral. This structure was adopted from the earliest of several scripts and admirably serves Attenborough's purpose, to make Gandhi's life meaningful in the knowledge of his fate. A striking parallel of course exists with the Crucifixion, and Gandhi appears to have had a strong premonition of his violent death. Opening with his death is the only distortion

of an otherwise chronological narrative. Such a progression, without flashbacks, feels appropriate; although Gandhi constantly developed his personal discipline out of past experience, he seemed to live in the present moment, neither harking back (except in the darker stages of the transfer of power), nor publicly planning much ahead. His apparently irrational behaviour, the fasts, the days of silence, the symbolic acts such as the Salt March, which the film rightly highlights, caused much frustration and anguish to his friends. Kingsley's characterisation catches constantly at Gandhi's reluctance to compromise on today's means for tomorrow's ends, however theoretically desirable.

The nature of film biography dictates that the characters react to the behaviour of the central one. The cast of *Gandhi* (John Gielgud, John Mills, Athol Fugard, Edward Fox, Trevor Howard and Saeed Jaffrey) extracts performances of often surprising complexity from roles which are often pared to a minimum. Kingsley himself is in nearly every scene and never falters in conveying massive integrity combined with a quirky charm. Gandhi is utterly approachable but, in the same moment, detached. He is never bogus, boring or simply decrepit (descriptions that find sympathy with many, especially young Indians). Gandhi's explosive sense of humour is near the surface, ready to surprise, but equally Kingsley uses his whole body to express the rending pain of personal responsibility that Gandhi feels, when news of the latest outburst of violence reaches him. At an early stage, he stirs a hostile audience in South Africa to accept non-violence as a weapon, smiling ruefully as he graphically describes, in a slightly trembling staccato tone, the dangers that lie in store for them.

A particularly revealing scene, in which pain and fun coexist, occurs when Gandhi is in his first British jail in India. Andrews, his long-standing friend and

man-of-the-cloth, whom we first meet in a street in South Africa trying to avoid Gandhi's desire to turn the other cheek to some belligerent Boers, visits him compassionately. First they share a joke that people are calling Gandhi 'Bapu', meaning Father, then Gandhi gently explains to his friend that he can best serve the cause by leaving India to work for it abroad. For a few seconds Andrews cannot comprehend Bapu's words, then his face slowly crumples with the shock to his devotion to this man. It is a very private moment showing what Gandhi is made of, and the source of his power. Outside the devoted, near-riotous crowd can be heard asking for Gandhi. Through his personal discipline, his satyagraha, or 'holding fast to truth', in this case his belief that the struggle cannot rely on an Englishman, however committed, Gandhi has power to influence an individual, or a crowd, at will.

This discussion lies nearly halfway through the film. It grows believably out of Gandhi's courage and foresight in South Africa. Fired after his midnight expulsion from a whites-only railway carriage and a lonely night on the platform, which he described as a 'watershed of my life', through beatings, intimidation and jail, culminating in the capitulation to some of the Indian demands by General Smuts, Gandhi develops the only concept of resistance available to the powerless, that of non-cooperation. The gentleman's agreement reached between the outwardly reasonable, uniformed Smuts and the troublesome jailbird makes a scene which Athol Fugard and Kingsley charge with exactly the spirit of precarious change, as brute force begins to yield some quarter to non-violence.

Gandhi scrupulously avoids using India and Indians as local colour. Many scenes, both spectacular and intimate, play upon the emotions: the assassination; Gandhi's near assault on his wife for refusing to clean latrines as he wishes;

the interrogation of the impassive General Dyer after the Amritsar Massacre; Gandhi's return to his birthplace with the American journalists (the sole reference to his early life before the age of 24); the sickening blows meted out to the non-violent protesters defying the Salt Tax. But it is in the scenes of the death of Gandhi's wife Kasturba and of his last fast in Calcutta that Kingsley meets his moment. As Gandhi leans over the death-bed of the illiterate woman whom he married at the age of 13, a whole life together is recalled. During the final hours of the fast against the killing of Hindus and Muslims in 1947, a crazed Hindu, played with terrible conviction by Om Puri, abuses the bedridden, enfeebled Mahatma. By sheer force of character, an anguished Gandhi convinces this particular sufferer that there is a 'way out of hell'. It is an ominous moment.

The film is triumphantly not a deification, but it is necessarily a simplification, and suffers from some of those disadvantages, since far more of the events in Gandhi's life have been passed over than have been shown. Some of his odder views, for instance on sex and on village life, are fleetingly mentioned. The criticism of the British of the Raj sometimes lacks subtlety, depicting a social gulf between communities that yawns too wide. Perhaps Gandhi's astonishing rapport with vast crowds, but yet so different from that of his contemporary Hitler, needed a stronger showing, which it has in the Indian version. But the embattled spirit of respect for human dignity and the need for mutual tolerance flow clearly through the film. One wonders exactly how a South African audience will react; the film has not been banned. Gandhi himself believed fervently that there was no such philosophy as Gandhism, but he would surely have approved of influencing audiences everywhere with his example, through a film, infused with his delight in life. □

Mixed up together

Heat and Dust/Gavin Millar

Speaking of a shrine once sacred to Muslims, a character in *Heat and Dust* (Enterprise) wryly reflects how it is now equally sacred to the Hindus: 'Everything gets mixed up together in time in India.' The whirligig of time is at the heart of Ruth Praver Jhabvala's short but complex novel from which James Ivory and Ismail Merchant have drawn one of their best films. The idea is simple. Anne, a young Englishwoman of today, becomes intrigued by the mysterious story of her great aunt Olivia, the first wife of Douglas, who had been a civil servant—a district 'collector'—in India in the 1920s. Encouraged by the reading of Olivia's letters to her sister Marcia, Anne determines to visit India and learn the secrets of the scandalous life which had led to Olivia's divorce from the upright Douglas

more than half a century before. The film divides itself equally between Anne's modern quest and the reconstructed life of colonial India in the 20s, weaving a complicated but illuminating pattern out of the domestic and political intrigues. As a meditation on time, or colonialism, or national character, or on fashions in religion, philosophy, or medicine, or on the immutabilities of sex, *Heat and Dust* is as wise as it is unpretentious.

The resonances set up by the constant leaping of the gap between the two periods are tactfully used to sustain rather than interrupt the film's rhythm. There are obvious dangers of glibness in such opportunities: the drawing room of Dr and Mrs Saunders' villa in the Civil Lines is now the Satipur Post Office. The breadwinner of the family with whom

Anne lodges, Inder Lal, works in an office which was once the preserve of the lonely and bored Olivia; Douglas' quarters are now the town hall. But these ironies are understated and their delicacy is a tribute not only to Ivory but to the work of the production designer Wilfred Shingleton. Architectural adaptation occurs at every level except the highest. Inder Lal takes Anne to visit the Nawab's palace fifteen miles outside the town. It is still magnificent, but a magnificent shell. The guide shows them reluctantly round a shuttered mausoleum. In this gloomy shrine to vanished splendour, Inder Lal offers more than friendship to Anne, which, for the moment, she declines.

And what is the hidden correspondence here? Why, of course, the very heart of the mystery, for Olivia's secret, eventually known to the world, was to have fallen in love with the princely Nawab and to have been obliged, by both communities, to have an abortion. Not that the Nawab himself had demanded it. Far

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from it. It is one of the pleasant complexities of the piece that, while the Nawab sees the birth of a son to the wife of the British District Collector (he has no doubt that the child will be his, or that it will be a boy) as an affirmation of his virility (his own wife having proved barren), his mother, the impressively regal Begum, regards the event as a disgrace to be prevented at all costs. The ironies are more extensive still, however. The British authorities are convinced that the Nawab is in league with local bandits, the dacoits; and that his illegitimate offspring has been conceived as a revenge on the British colonial presence. Thus the poor unborn creature becomes the symbol of multiple incomprehensions.

The outcome is seen, thankfully, in terms of human and personal joy and misery rather than as collective political guilt. No Aunt Sallys are set up, but an extensive and sympathetic review of all our foolishnesses is the focus of the film. Ivory seems at his most relaxed for some time, as if returning to home ground. The quality of observation smoothly matches that of the novel. We warm to the perfect balance of sympathy and witty distance as the bored, imaginative but unformed Olivia is drawn into the Nawab's net. But this is to caricature the way in which the Nawab is himself conceived: he is as much drawn into hers. For all his pride, savoir-faire and princely splendour, he is endearingly naive and impressionable in those areas where it hurts to be vulnerable. He is as much seduced by this innocent as seducing. These two are the heart of whatever bald generalisations we want to make (and the film forbears to) about the ways in which the two nations, the coloniser and colonised, have fallen in and out of love with one another.

Happily, the film confines itself to accurate observation of particulars. With what perfect judgment Ivory offers us glimpses of the Begum at home, surrounded by giggling handmaidens and languid older maids, glaring out from what one might call the Uncivil Lines at what the conqueror has to offer in the way of civilisation. All they wish to appropriate, it seems from a late glance, is not cricket, but the foxtrot. How well conceived (by Jhabvala) and executed (by Ivory) is the scene of the picnic, when the Nawab and his young men (to set her mind at rest) whisk Olivia out into the desert and set her down upon silken mats by a sunset lake to share a sumptuous repast. What fun—for her—that it should end with that most innocuous of English games, musical chairs—or rather, musical cushions; a merry prelude to a seduction. How truthful, on the other hand, is the Nawab's defence of his warlike ancestry. Relating a tale of blood-soaked vengeance which shocks Olivia, he is puzzled in turn by her incomprehension of the point of honour that is involved.

In the present, Anne treads with some tact among the complex codes which she knows her great aunt transgressed, both British and Indian. She laughingly repels



'Heat and Dust': the Nawab (Shashi Kapoor), Olivia (Greta Scacchi).

a silly American boy, Chid, who has shaved his head and donned orange robes, frowning on his begging for sexual and financial favours as opportunism. But with even greater tact, just at the point where we are dismissing him too, Ivory takes him back, letting Anne see the mote of earnestness beneath the boy's beam of vanity. Unlike the book, the film refuses to let him into her bed. That favour is reserved for Inder Lal, who proves for Anne to have, effortlessly, the extra, indefinable dimension of India that Chid had striven for so foolishly. Anne conceives his child and, with the tacit complicity of the spey-wife, the wise-woman Maji, decides to avoid abortion and let the child be born, offspring of East and West in willing alliance. She climbs into the mountains to have her baby, to the house which the Nawab had built for the disgraced Olivia, nestling at the foot of remote and snowy peaks. The ladies of the Civil Lines at Satipur had fled to high Simla in the summer, to avoid the heat and dust. Anne's journey is more of a quest than an escape.

There are differences between the book and the film. On the whole they are differences of emphasis. Major Minnies has no time for 'Our Friend' when he (the Nawab) indulges the banditry of the dacoits. But he acknowledges that 'he is'—with relish and regret—'a Prince'. Minnies is given to quoting couplets of Urdu poetry which speak to him of other, softer dimensions, of a life not of spirit and sense as a soldier knows, but of spirituality and sensuality which a soldier must resist. There is less of this major in the film. There is less, too, of that other 'dimension'. The films of Ivory and Merchant have sometimes been found wanting in wholeheartedness. Their good taste has seemed, from time to time, to make them turn aside from the extremes of degradation or exaltation. Here for instance they avoid any mention of some important elements in the book: the sut-

tee (the enforced suicide of a widow on her husband's funeral pyre) which provokes riots that Douglas is obliged to put down; or the fact that one of the treatments meted out to Inder Lal's epileptic wife is the application of a red-hot poker to her feet and arms; or the physical decay of the old peasant woman whom Maji and Anne tend in her dying hours. These are symptomatic omissions and might be defended.

What is less defensible is the absence of a final note of aspiration in Anne's chronicle, which robs the film of part, at least, of that other dimension towards which she has been honestly stumbling. Anne's sojourn in the mountains ends the book: 'I'm impatient for it to stop raining because I want to move on, go higher up. I keep looking up all the time, but everything remains hidden. Unable to see, I imagine mountain peaks higher than any I've ever dreamed of; the snow on them is also whiter than all other snow—so white it is luminous and shines against the sky which is of a deeper blue than any yet known to me. That is what I expect to see. Perhaps it is also what Olivia saw: the view—or vision—that filled her eyes all those years and suffused her soul.'

It would be hard to match the depth and simplicity of this prose. But if there is one regret to record against this excellent film it is that Ivory has not quite given us a glimpse of the invisible mountains, but has, diffidently, perhaps, or embarrassedly, lowered his eyes at the last minute. Otherwise there is nothing to reproach, especially in the performances of Greta Scacchi as Olivia, Julie Christie as Anne, Christopher Cazenove as Douglas and, brilliant in his Englishness and his Indianness, Shashi Kapoor as the Nawab; nor the photography of Walter Lassally which does equal justice to the design, the landscape and the interiors, both of the buildings and the people. □

Out of the deep blue

Hammett/Richard Combs

The opening credits of *Hammett* (Artificial Eye) appear over a shot of swirling water, an eddy that is hypnotically sluggish, with an oleaginous, deep-blue opacity. It is shortly placed as part of a scene, set on a fogbound wharf and to do with a pay-off, a betrayal and a laconic farewell, which Dashiell Hammett (Frederic Forrest) is typing as the conclusion to a *Black Mask* story. But as an image, it recalls the metaphoric 'pool of ink' into which a coshed Philip Marlowe sank in Edward Dmytryk's version of *Farewell, My Lovely*. And it immediately summons memories of all the expressionist-like montages, inserts and overall chiaroscuro lighting that permeated a kind of cross-genre, from private eye through thriller to *film noir*, during the 40s. *Hammett* immediately defines itself in terms of this tradition, though in a special relationship which remains the dominating feature (and puzzle) of the film. The wharfside scene Hammett is composing is a fair parody of the mannerisms of hard-boiled fiction, though the way the scene is replayed (for 'real', in Hammett's life) at the end is a sort of vindication of those same mannerisms.

Equally special is Wim Wenders' relationship to the material. Or, to put it another way, there is a kind of fortuitous tie-up here, in the director of *The American Friend* and the German *Scarlet Letter* taking on this most American of projects, while there still seems to be some final lack of necessity about *Hammett*. It is this, perhaps, a faint air of the academic exercise in its recreation of the 40s ambience, with unobtrusive colour and lighting wherever possible striated with shadows, that explains the film's generally chilly reception (this and the long saga of its troubled production, easily read as an omen of disaster). And if Wenders might be taken as the most 'American' of the New German directors, he does not, paradoxically, have the most fitting background for *noir*. This could more accurately be claimed by Herzog, self-avowedly in the line of German Romanticism which produced Murnau and the expressionism that had its carry-over in Hollywood. Wenders, moreover, even at his most American (*Alice in the Cities*, *Kings of the Road*), is free of the studio and more or less of the narrative, where *Hammett*—at least as it now stands, though the first version, shot in early 1980, was reputedly somewhat different—is almost entirely studio-bound and features a corkscrewing 40s plot.

Part of one's sense of the strange diversity, the convolution of the film is that Wenders is adapting to a model of filmmaking not at all his own in order to work through obsessions that are very much his: the influence of American culture, the grip on the subconscious of such

pulp forms as the detective story, and the uses of language (literary and visual) in achieving self-definition. Not surprisingly, there are trails other than the plot corkscrewing through *Hammett*, and both Wenders and his producer, Francis Coppola, may in the end have got the film they wanted: a cultural detective story and a classical detective story respectively. Schizophrenia, after all, is matter-of-factly inscribed in the film's technical credits, in which there are two names for every major function, reflecting the two different versions shot almost two years apart.

The classic element, to give it its due, works in an admirably terse, crisp, humorous vein. Hammett in 1928, an ex-private detective who has turned to writing detective fiction for the pulps, not a roaring literary success but a celebrity in his way in the San Francisco netherworld, is bearded by ex-colleague Jimmy Ryan (Peter Boyle) who needs help with a current case. Hammett is reluctant, but Ryan invokes an old debt—he saved Hammett's life when the latter was a 'green kid' in the Pinkertons—and the two are soon headed for Chinatown after a missing girl, Crystal Ling (Lydia Lei). But Hammett loses track of Ryan, and then finds himself embroiled in a double search—for the girl and the motive behind Ryan's assignment. The latter inevitably leads to a cesspool of civic corruption, blackmail and the private vices of a gang of businessmen who run the city without political portfolio. As for

Crystal, her nature is also classically dual: the little girl lost who comes to Hammett's apartment to plead that she used to be 'a very, very skill-ed whore, until I found Christ the Redeemer' and the scarlet *femme fatale* of the end, pointing guns and walking off with the loot to a valediction from Hammett, 'You're going up against the powerhouse, angel, the big steam...'

Alongside this plot, which involves Hammett in a crisis of loyalty, is its shadow, which involves him in a crisis of language. At the point where Hammett is separated from Ryan, he also loses the manuscript of his latest *Black Mask* story. Asked what he will do about it, Hammett brashly replies, 'I'll write it better.' And that is what his subsequent adventure seems to be preparing him for. 'Better' here implies the mutation of his pulp magazine fiction into the stuff of *The Maltese Falcon*, which the plot of *Hammett* loosely apes (even if *Black Mask* Hammett is not worlds away from the subsequent novelist). But the prime evolution is the need to renounce father figure/alter ego Jimmy Ryan, who in the wharfside scene being tapped out at the beginning is cast in the role of Hammett's anonymous hero, the Continental Op, a role he cedes at the end to Hammett, who is now at the point of baptising his hero Sam Spade. (Interestingly enough, in the first version of the film Ryan was played by Brian Keith, an actor both physically similar to and much older than Frederic Forrest, and replaced apparently because of Coppola's uneasiness with the relationship by Peter Boyle, who actually looks younger than Forrest's Hammett, given the premature ageing wrought by tuberculosis and alcohol.)

What is *not* involved in any of the



'Hammett': Fong (Michael Chow), Hammett (Frederic Forrest).

FILM REVIEWS

film's permutations is a biopic account of the tension between the writer and his fictional world—in the sense intended by those reviewers who criticised the claustrophobic style, the totally hermetic, *noir*-derived milieu, for making no distinction between Hammett's real world and the one he wrote about. Not only does this ignore the fictionalising of Hammett himself, but lops off some of the more interesting convolutions in the film's premise: a work of detection tracking down the writer who came out of Hammett the Pinkerton detective. This much was also the basis of Joe Gores'

novel (from which the film, through countless rewrites, has moved some distance away), although there it was the death of an old colleague which goaded Hammett into action, rather than being a necessary culmination.

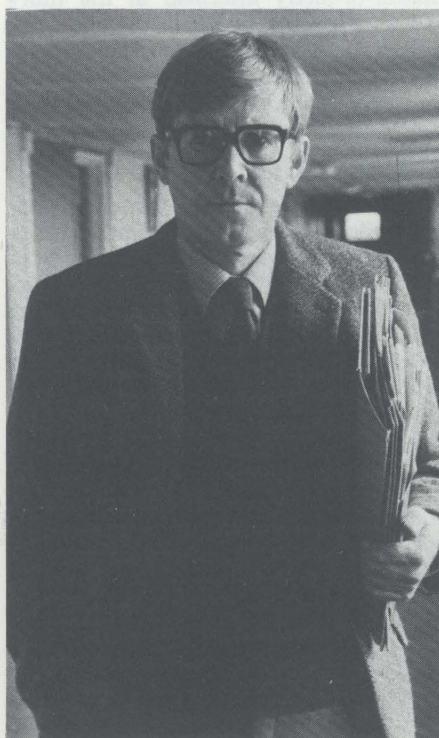
Aspects of the film's origins and pedigree are perhaps overelaborated, running from Elisha Cook (ex-Jnr)'s appearance as a cabbie to the glossing of the term 'gunsel' in Hammett's conversation with gangland lawyer Hagedorn (a rather huffing and puffing take-off of Sidney Greenstreet by Roy Kinnear). And were it not for the fact that they clearly signal that

the typewriter is mightier than the gun, Wenders' delirious montages of Hammett pounding his keys might look like a more laboured device than anything dreamed of by Edward Dmytryk. But if anything redeems *Hammett* from the charge of visual chic, it is its act of literary retrieval, which allows the hard-boiled currency parodied at the beginning to be reminted at the end. In this best of all generic worlds, things work out more happily than in *Kings of the Road*, where the representatives of the word and the image are returned to their respective points zero, and left there. □

Our Alan *Intensive Care* John Pym

Why Alan Bennett? One has seen and heard—or at least one seems to have seen and heard—a great deal of what surfaces in an Alan Bennett play before. Is it, perhaps, because there is a sort of old-fashioned decency to the man? The spectacles, the jersey under the schoolmaster's jacket, the careful tie, the groomed head, the parting (his barber has not known the Liverpudlian mop or the Mohican), the distinctive tone of voice, the stress laid on the carefully chosen name... all have endured, confidently. An equally carefully maintained front? Maybe. Nevertheless, there is a peculiar comfort to be derived from the fact that, although the *Fringe*, like the Beatles, has now passed into our history, Alan Bennett has continued, unobtrusively, to ply his craft. He has not become a telly personality. To see that familiar figure crop up among the predominantly anarchic, self-advertising cast of humorists, musicians and personalities at the 1981 Amnesty gala—and to find him surprising us with a forthright, cleverly judged sketch on homosexual practices (a sketch far more surprising than the surrounding scattershot ribaldry)—is to experience a quirky, individual and very British (very regionally British) talent.

Intensive Care is a loose play. It has none of the concentration of form or dark melancholy of *A Woman of No Importance*, a monologue by a woman, one of those office women whom Bennett catches to a T, who is withering away from some unspecified disease. (Both were included in a six-play series broadcast by BBC TV in November and December). In *Intensive Care*, Midgely—and to hear with what weary resignation that name is savoured is one of the small pleasures that Alan Bennett as his own leading player offers—is summoned to the hospital where his father is dying. He is a teacher, put-upon, and a husband, put-upon. He has an oafish teenage son. Things do not appear to have worked out. There are things, indefinable things, that he should have said to his Dad. But his Dad now lies in a coma—and the



Midgely (Alan Bennett).

hospital is all breezy efficiency, like a Bennett office, where everyone has his appointed task, where an ironclad hierarchy prevails, but where somehow that human touch which has eluded Midgely in his relationship with his father is missing.

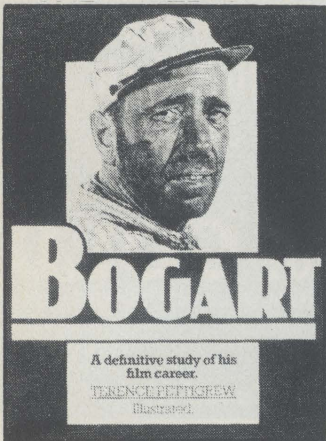
Midgely determines to wait. It is, in any event, something of a relief to be away from his wife. We are, of course, up North. And here is another problem, Midgely speaks like a Yorkshireman, but he lacks those traditional character traits which Southerners and professional Northerners have chosen to bestow upon the inhabitants of that far-off country. He is, in truth, something of a wet fish. His wife, a hearty soul, sensed this long ago, so did his son. People trample upon Midgely, or ignore him, or just talk at him not expecting anything but one of those curious Bennett noises signifying a lifetime of troubles philosophically borne. But, being Alan Bennett, Midgely is an impossible man to dislike: he has a sort of decency and rectitude to him, as out of fashion as his clothes. And like many losers before him, Midgely gets the girl. The night nurse Valery, Julie Walters, a

performer as consistently attractive as Bennett himself (and the perfect partner, all ruffled, noisy, animal good spirits), takes a shine to Midgely. It now becomes imperative that Dad, who has shown no signs of either declining or reviving, hangs on to allow Midgely time to spread his hitherto clipped wings, to remove his spectacles and get into bed with Valery.

Keeping vigil with Midgely is his Aunt Kitty. What comfort the name of Thora Hird induces. What anticipated pleasures. The consummate type-cast professional: the spectacles as much a fixture as Bennett's, her wry delivery of a sidelong comment, her personification of outraged middle-class propriety, the hands clasping the handbag, the hat immovably in place, Thora Hird—like Alan Bennett—has become more unobtrusively practised in her craft as the years have passed. She relishes her vigil: human life passes before Midgely and Aunt Kitty in the ante-room; she talks, passes comment (one cannot even dislike her for her patronising racialism: it's how she is), he listens. The boy Midgely—like the little Woody Allen, serious, solemn-faced—is conjured in a dream: a picnic, the father striding towards the boy and his mother and the spread, all confidence.

While Midgely and Valery have been canoodling, Dad rallies momentarily, smiles and dies—without saying a final word. Valery has taken the phone off the hook so they will not be disturbed. Things seem a little brighter. In any event, Midgely has met his father's statuesque lady friend, Elizabeth Spriggs—indignant Aunt Kitty's vigil has not been for nothing—discovered something about his Dad, that he had a streak of pride and a not unworthy streak of pride, even if he, Midgely, wasn't able to tell him about Valery. Slight television fare, by an eminently safe name? Yes, up to a point. Gavin Millar, the director, has a natural, undemonstrative sympathy with the play's characters. But there is something more. The pleasure of performances, for one thing. Alan Bennett's landscape is laid before us. We don't learn anything new, but to be taken through it again, to renew acquaintanceship with people who have not been written up to order or so that they can be pilloried or put through the hoops of some outlandish plot, but are just there, is a rare pleasure. A British pleasure, a British victory. □

PROTEUS FILMS



BOGART: A Definitive Study of His Film Career
by Terence Pettigrew



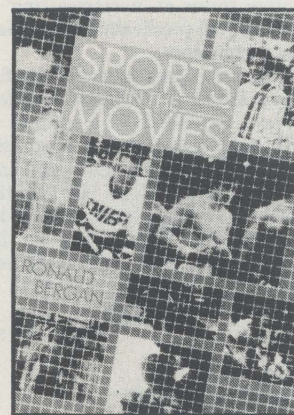
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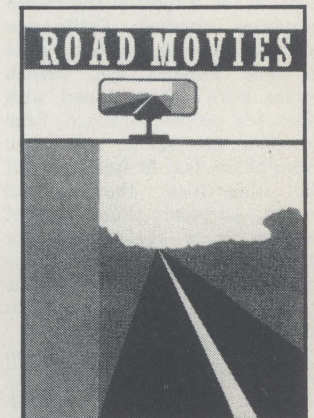
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BOOK REVIEWS

Educating Jeremy

WHAT'S THIS CHANNEL FOUR?

An Alternative Report
edited by Simon Blanchard,
David Morley

Comedia/£3.50 (paperback)

CHANNEL FOUR Television with a Difference?

by Stephen Lambert

BFI/£3.95 (paperback)

When, in 1973, Jeremy Isaacs made a submission to the Minister of Posts and Telecommunications on the subject of the fourth television channel, Californian body conditioning was but a glint in Jane Fonda's eye, British homes were not equipped with video, few people had heard of the women's movement and even fewer of the IFA. In Isaacs' list of the 'minorities' the channel should address, there figured neither blacks, nor women, nor the handicapped, nor the peace movement, nor indeed any of the sub-cultures and pressure groups we take for granted today.

So the history of Channel 4, you might say, is the history of Jeremy's education and, through him, that of the TV mandarins. It shows how they all came to terms with the postwar baby boom, the expansion of higher education, the Vietnam protest movement and the radicalism of the early 70s. A decade after the creation of *Time Out*, television has finally begun to serve the audiences that magazine identified, but at a national level. In this way the legacy of the 60s has finally been realised, and it is only extraordinary that such a glorious new toy should have been thrust into the hands of erstwhile flower persons just when monetarism's cold winds have frozen the climate in which they used to bloom.

In reviewing these books I have an advantage not available to their authors, for I have actually seen the beast (or a bit of it) and I know that it speaks to me! Channel 4 is a playground for the children of Marx and Freud and therefore shares with dairy cream the property of being 'nice but naughty'. This is not the view, however, of the Comedia Publishing Group's 'Alternative report' *What's This Channel Four?*. When the alternative looks at the alternative, much cant is likely to issue forth, and so it is that Simon Blanchard (ex-IFA) and David (?Dave) Morley (ex-CCCS) have put together a very patchy collection of pieces which address themselves to the nature of Channel 4's address to minorities.

On the whole, the contributors do not like what they have found, but as often as not this is less Channel 4's fault than the failure of practice to keep pace with theory. For example, if one is to believe Sue Clayton (in a witty contribution entitled 'Cherchez la femme'), Italian feminists are so heavily into the female body that they long ago transcended the agonising dilemmas of 'male erotic privilege'. I would just like to hear Jeremy Isaacs tell that to Mrs Whitehouse! More seriously, the fact is that this collection, whether it discusses race, sex, independent film, Wales or continuing education, simultaneously confirms that Channel 4 is different (though most contributors would probably not accept this), and fails to confront the major problem all TV critics endure—namely, that the people who work in television, as a general rule, are not intellectuals. When most, if not all, the editors of ITN think that Tony Benn is a Marxist, there doesn't seem much point in referring to Althusser.

Stephen Lambert's approach is much more sober and, dare one say it, circumspect. This is partly because he is a pupil of Mary Warnock's and therefore constrained to be dispassionate, and perhaps also because his publisher (the BFI) is deeply, if indirectly, involved in Channel 4. Many of the people who lobbied furiously about the fourth channel, from the mid-60s onwards, were in some way connected with the Institute, and it was certainly in the BFI's boardroom that Alan Fountain first taught Jeremy Isaacs the meaning of the word 'workshop'. This is only to say, of course, that the Institute was doing the job government paid it to do, but this is not always reflected in Lambert's text, which, though it is sympathetic to all the right liberal initiatives, sometimes lacks political sensitivity and certainly takes no view of the broader cultural issues at stake. To this Lambert would probably retort that it was no part of his intention to do so, so that it is only fair to add that his book is an excellently researched, clearly written and presented history of the planning of Channel 4.

Lambert goes right back to the creation of ITV1 and traces the successive hopes and fears of the parties involved in the debate: politicians, the ITV companies, the IBA, the BBC, the hardware and software manufacturers and so on. He reproduces a number of crucial policy documents such as Isaacs' 1973 submission (already referred to), Channel 4's programme policy statement and statements by many of the commissioning editors. The only failure of the book, if it is one, is that it takes no view of the new Channel's likely success. The section on the economics of advertising is descriptive rather than



Vengeful mood: poster by S. John Woods.

analytical and Lambert does not discuss the impact of cable and other forms of 'narrowcasting' on a Channel predicated on the need to narrowcast.

As I sit down to watch the first instalment of *Nicholas Nickleby* I am reminded of a remark by David Edgar that his adaptation owed its success not, as many critics imagined, to the fact that it was the first play of the 80s, but to the fact that it was the last play of the 60s. I fervently hope that this will not prove to be Channel 4's epitaph.

JILL FORBES

Posters

PROJECTING BRITAIN Ealing Studios Film Posters

edited by David Wilson
with an introduction
by Bevis Hillier

BFI/£7.95

In the days when Britain was on its uppers yet never prouder, when social revolution involved free dentures on the NHS, when branch lines still survived and when a Falklands scenario was bound to be by T. E. B. Clarke, Ealing films caught something of the national mood. They dealt with war and peace, Us and Them (foreigners mostly), the Good Old Days (pre-1914), silly restrictions at every turn and endless red tape. They were, Michael Balcon said, 'films about day-dreamers, mild anarchists, little men who long to kick the boss in the teeth.' He was talking about Ealing comedies but his words apply equally well to the dramas and melodramas about wartime privations and East End crime.

S. John Woods, Advertising Director at Ealing Studios from 1943 to 1955, was responsible for projecting the image of the films on hoardings, placards and in cinema foyers. He took his job seriously enough to attempt high

poster art. Like Frank Pick at London Transport before the war, or Jack Beddington at Shell, he commissioned artists like John Piper and John Minton to produce designs that differed radically from the usual. Minton, for example, drew a Romney Marsh pastoral with the heroine gazing out over a typical neo-romantic confusion of roots and foliage, a sunset scene true to the atmosphere of *The Loves of Joanna Godden* (screenplay by H. E. Bates), far better than the alternative poster used by the distributors which emphasised Googie Withers' role in an eternal triangle to the exclusion of all else. Yet presumably cinemagoers were more likely to be attracted to a potentially thrilling romance than to overwrought undergrowth. Repeatedly in *Projecting Britain* the unusual and the commercial are juxtaposed. All too often the crass or obvious interpretation of the film—the one the distributors opted for—looks more appropriate than the one intended to stand comparison not with current rivals but with the great poster forebears, the Beggarstaff Brothers and Toulouse-Lautrec.

As Bevis Hillier observes in his lively introduction, at this time 'the art of the poster was in its high maturity, almost its swansong period (for mainly graphic posters gave way after the 1950s to mainly photographic ones).' Those like Barnett Freedman or Edward Bawden who turned their hand to film posters as a change from dustjackets or book illustrations did so because they had style. S. John Woods recognised this (Bawden, Freedman et al were stars of the Penrose Annual) when he invited them to make something of *Hue and Cry* or *Johnny Frenchman*. The artists were adding distinction, lending an air of overall integrity to the picture.

Not long ago Bawden's original design for *The Titfield Thunderbolt* was exhibited at the Fine Art Society in Bond Street. The cranky old railway engine with



Workers' Playtime: poster by Clifford Rowe.

the vicar on the footplate puffs credits from its Egyptianate chimney. This is pure Bawden, a quirky combination of folk art and early Victorian engraving, a design more in keeping with the Fine Art Society than with high street cinemas. But then the ineffably 'u' cert character of Ealing comedies, the idealised crankiness, the right-little-tight-little insularity of attitudes and jokes, was also anomalous in high street terms. The desire to provide mass audiences with something different in the way of posters stemmed from a set of attitudes that, as Bevis Hillier says, found ultimate expression in the Festival of Britain. There, on the South Bank and in celebrations arranged throughout the British Isles, the spirit of Ealing (together with that of the BBC Home Service) was exhibited in concrete and glass and wickerwork.

Projecting Britain is a picture-book that betrays on every page the muddle of high hopes and good intentions behind such projects as *Saraband for Dead Lovers* ('A Romance that rocked the Thrones of Kings') and J. B. Priestley's *They Came to a City*, a venture that proved him and Basil Dearden to be no match for Powell and Pressburger. It was no good simply assuming that Edward Ardizzone could rise to the challenge and make *The Magnet*, so to speak, magnetic. S. John Woods himself was a better designer than most of those he employed. His *Cage of Gold*, with Jean Simmons pointing her revolver at the cinemagoer, surrounded by golden lines, turgid clouds and a dull red haze of passion, is a brilliant summary of vengeful mood. His collaborative designs were also remarkable, in particular the music-hall pastiche of *Champagne Charlie*, for which Barnett Freedman did the lettering and Eric Fraser provided a grinning Tommy Trinder. *The Lavender Hill Mob* poster features Alec Guinness and Stanley Holloway hugging each other as their dreams come true while,

behind their film-still selves, Ronald Searle figures leap around, among them half a dozen St Trinian's girls, themselves key representatives of Ealing period culture.

Here the origin of all these posters becomes suddenly apparent. Bevis Hillier, quoting George Perry, points out the similarity between the Ealing ethos and that of *Picture Post*. True, but as far as the posters are concerned an even closer parallel is *Lilliput*. Many of the artists used by S. John Woods were *Lilliput* stalwarts. James Boswell was for some years the Art Editor. His designs for *It Always Rains on Sunday* and *The Blue Lamp* belong to a social realism genre developed as a British response to George Grosz. Boswell's colleagues in the Artists' International Association leadership, James Fitton (*Kind Hearts and Coronets*) and Clifford Rowe (*Dreaming*, with Flanagan & Allen wafted to an eternal Workers' Playtime in the sky), had the *Lilliput* outlook: a love of colourful, lefty, warm-hearted display, a readiness to regard photographers as equals, to celebrate Britishness in a pocket format.

Lilliput was a mixture of short stories, cartoons, picture stories and startling photo-comparisons. The mix was very Ealing: the same jokiness, the same appeals to one's better nature. *Lilliput*, like *Picture Post* and Ealing Studios, was killed off by TV. Demand faltered, the mix failed. Ealing Studios became part of the BBC empire. The sort of patronage exerted, by S. John Woods became, for a while, identified with the BBC. Commercially speaking the posters preserved in this book must be deemed non-starters.

Yet among the duff bits of beaux arts moderne and the whiskery sensitivity there are at least a dozen designs so distinctive and idiosyncratic they have to be recognised as masterpieces of a sort. Barnett Freedman's tri-colour *Johnny Frenchman*, all

starch and suavity, Reginald Mount's *Train of Events* (an abstract marshall yard), John Piper's *Pink String and Sealing Wax* (darkest Brighton) and Clifford Rowe's *Dreaming* were every bit as good as the films they helped promote. The art lay in creating images that served as lures, that showed off the stars, their dramatic predicaments, together with names and titles and other unavoidable clutter, in a single arresting composition.

What seems so extraordinary about these posters is that they are so obviously hit and miss. S. John Woods apparently had the freedom to experiment, to take risks, to try artists who had no experience of the film business and who were unwilling or unlikely to adapt themselves to suit. Though the distributors could always move in and impose what they saw fit, Woods had the initiative. For every few failures there was one surprising success. It has to be said though that those whose work had the most appropriate impact were invariably the professionals. Well-known artists produced characteristic examples of their gallery work: the graphic artists on the other hand knew their stuff. In the long run it's the home-grown Ealing style of Reginald Mount, George Chapman, and others who remain anonymous, that has most impact and most period flavour.

WILLIAM FEAVER

Hitchcock

HITCHCOCK: THE MURDEROUS GAZE
by William Rothman

Harvard University Press/
£19.25

THE SILENT SCREAM
Alfred Hitchcock's Sound Track

by Elisabeth Weis
Fairleigh Dickinson
University Press/\$19.50

For someone who never apparently met Hitchcock, William Rothman is remarkably confident that if he had done so he would have been able to strip away the disguises, he would have been able to ask the right questions to allow the old master at last to open his heart. Indeed, in his amazingly pretentious and unguarded Postscript he even observes: 'That the voice speaking for Hitchcock's films here is also possessed by them is what is most deeply Hitchcockian about the book, what Hitchcock would most have appreciated, I believe, what might have moved him beyond words.' Yes, well, mm...

If there may be detected in my comments a note of personal

snappishness, I had best admit at once to an interest: Mr Rothman does not approve of my Hitchcock biography at all, since my 'faith in the consensus view' (which he maintains is that Hitchcock was no artist) conditioned my encounters with the man. He does, however, admit that I was possibly an innocent dupe, with whom Hitchcock collaborated in order to ensure uncomprehending silence about 'the secret places of his work.' Poor Truffaut, on the other hand, with no doubt the impenetrable superiority of the French, encountered a Hitchcock 'unable to enter into a serious conversation with a man who thinks he is his intellectual superior but is far from his equal.'

I do not cite these judgments in a spirit of complaint: there is no reason at all why Mr Rothman should like either of our books. But they do point to a curious kind of naiveté about the creative process which is becoming increasingly widespread in American writing on film in these post-structuralist days. It is back to the old pseudo-intellectual stance of 'If he didn't know what he was doing, it doesn't count.' It seems to be vital to Mr Rothman that Hitchcock was totally conscious of everything in his films, that if he had been asked the right questions in the right comprehending spirit he would have told us everything about everything. Curious for a book which consists mostly of minutely detailed descriptions of what happens, on all levels, in five films, that the author seems to be denying the importance of the works themselves, as self-defining entities, in favour of an impassioned search for what Hitchcock really thought he was doing.

So, ultimately, who cares? A film is a film is a film. I showed the famous book-length explication in *Communications* of the cropduster scene in *North by Northwest* to both Hitchcock and Ernest Lehman (who had a lot more to do with its detailed elaboration than wholehearted auteurs would care to admit). It was the occasion of wonderment and some unseemly mirth. Nevertheless, the essay is all 'true', in the sense that nothing is misdescribed, everything stated to be there is actually there. One could, of course, attribute Hitchcock's mirth to his deviousness, and say that he really knew all the time. But it seems somehow more likely that he just thought in film, that he never did regard himself as 'anything other than a practical movie-maker'.

Which brings us to the body of Mr Rothman's book: his shot-by-shot, or at least blow-by-blow, descriptions of *The Lodger*, *Murder!*, *The Thirty Nine Steps*, *Shadow of a Doubt* and *Psycho* (an odd selection for which Mr Rothman, quite rightly, makes no apology). He does them in

BOOK REVIEWS

chronological order, dropped into a summary of Hitchcock's career. The passing comments on other films are written, often, in a frantic, over-emotional style which rather suggests the lay preacher in full cry. And yet, when he writes very specifically about some specific moment in a specific movie he can be both precise and perceptive: his working-out of the old red herring about homosexuality in *Murder!*, for instance, says just what has to be said, and he even finds new points to make about *Psycho*. It is for these exact dissections (and the excellent frame enlargements) that the book will be valued, and though it is a pity that no editor modified its more extravagant raptures, they do not finally reduce the usefulness of its better pages too much.

The Rothman book follows Hitchcock's own lead in regarding him as essentially a silent director, using sound as a tolerated adjunct. Professor Weis challenges the view, finding strong yearnings toward sound in even his really silent films: the 'silent scream' is in fact the first shot of his first personal film, *The Lodger*. She makes a good, detailed case for Hitchcock as a highly subtle and conscious user of all the soundtrack's possibilities. She does skirt rather round his surprising casualness about choosing the composers of his scores, though of course instinct rather than conscious knowledge can here also have been operative. The book does, however, manage to say almost everything one would wish said about the finished results—maybe even a little more, in that it finally has the slightly too determined air of a scholarly magazine article religiously dotting the i's and crossing the t's in order to make itself into a book.

JOHN RUSSELL TAYLOR

Scripture

MOVING PICTURES

by Budd Schulberg

Souvenir Press/£9.95

First indications are that *Moving Pictures* might be a Bible: a fat volume, one and three-quarter inches thick, divided into sections called Genesis, Exodus, Promised Land and Kings. One glance at the fly-leaf, however, and the perspective changes. 'Yours truly—Roscoe Arbuckle'; 'Hope to see you at my beach home soon—Bebe Daniels'—entries from the youthful Schulberg's autograph book, captured while he gambolled round the film sets of his father's studio.

For Hollywood is this Bible's Promised Land, and our guide has solid credentials. As the eldest son

of B. P. Schulberg, Vice-President in Charge of Production at Paramount from 1925 to 1932, Budd grew up in a crazy, charmed world. Where the rest of us had honorary relatives called Doris, he had Adolph Zukor and Louis B. Mayer. Hollywood studios were his playground. He would lie among the sets concocting imaginary movies; argue with his bosom pal Maurice Rapf (son of Harry, a key MGM producer of bread-and-butter films) over the relative merits of their studios' output; lob ripe figs at Greta Garbo. He knew the stars stripped of their tinsel. When Budd watched the drowning scene in B. P.'s production of *An American Tragedy*, he enjoyed Sylvia Sidney's fate with perverse, special interest: Sidney was his father's mistress.

Moving Pictures is stocked with unique, valuable memories (the narrative ends in 1932, with the author at Dartmouth College), but their effect is annoyingly damaged by Schulberg's muddled, prolix presentation. It is hard not to feel the veteran fiction writer of *What Makes Sammy Run?* and *The Disenchanted* giving his Hollywood background yet another shakedown. Conversations are cheerfully imagined ('"Porter, all this celluloid must be going to your brain!" Edison argued'); the style frequently lacks taste and polish ('Castles-in-the-sky for the have-nots from the ghettos of Eastern Europe were floating down to rest on that distant shore of the blue Pacific'). Facts are surrounded by a haze of exaggerations and omissions. Dorothy Arzner is over generously assessed as 'one of the top directors of the Thirties and Forties'; writer and producer Louis D. Lighton is consistently called Leighton.

Such peculiarities may be par for the course in autobiographies, but they stick out when the author goes out of his way to add his pennyworth to film history. The urge to make *Moving Pictures* The Cinema According to Budd Schulberg weighs particularly heavily on the early chapters, for Schulberg is here relaying material at second hand from his father's scrapbooks and an unpublished manuscript 'Thirty Odd Years'. The pioneer Edwin S. Porter, the man with celluloid in his brain, receives useful coverage; the naive world of the 'photoplay' is pleasantly captured; but the reader still longs for the bite of personal observation.

The problem, ultimately, lies with those one and three-quarter inches. We need an abridged version, to spotlight the piquant character studies (George Bancroft, the big-headed dimwit, hooked on the word 'facsimile'; the forgotten director Marcel DeSano, prime Hollywood flotsam, paralysed with fear after the

fluky success of *The Girl Who Wouldn't Work*). We need uncluttered chapters to tie together the threads of the Schulberg family drama. For buried under the paragraphs there are solid, sympathetic portraits: father Ben, an attractively wayward figure with great intellectual gifts and a matching talent for squandering them; mother Adeline, the indomitable fighter determined to escape her ghetto past, throwing herself into every available progressive cause. But at its present length, *Moving Pictures* only intermittently achieves the sharp focus one expects; and the pictures move very slowly.

GEOFF BROWN

Slumberville

OF MICE AND MAGIC The History of American Animated Cartoons

by Leonard Maltin

McGraw-Hill/£17.50

New English Library/£4.95
(paperback)

BEFORE MICKEY The Animated Film 1898-1928

by Donald Crafton

MIT Press, Cambridge,
Mass./\$25.00

THE ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF ANIMATED CARTOON SERIES

by Jeff Lenburg

LSP Books/£11.95

THE AMERICAN ANIMATED CARTOON A Critical Anthology

edited by Gerald Peary
and Danny Peary

E. P. Dutton, New York/
\$10.95 (paperback)

'Animation,' writes Donald Crafton, 'let alone silent animation, is admittedly a minor branch of the history of cinema.' Until recently, it was also unresearched and poorly documented. Now, in the last couple of years, several books have been published to inform us that there was not only a wealth of animation before Mickey but also during his Disney reign.

Of Mice and Magic is a straightforward, well-researched, well-illustrated history of the development of the American studios and includes a valuable and comprehensive filmography by studio. Leonard Maltin, probably best known for his reference work *TV Movies* and his previous look at American animation *The Disney Films*, is an avowed animation buff. His book is not only crammed with fact and anecdote but also reflects his enthusiasm for the genre. Nevertheless, it is a

pity that he has not devoted more space to American independent animators. While full coverage would require a book of its own, to omit them entirely leaves a serious gap. Recent developments are only mentioned in a brief closing paragraph, but when it comes to the activity of the studios during the 30s and 40s, Maltin is at his best.

In the absence of good documentation, myths have grown up around cartoon characters, but *Of Mice and Magic* puts facts before fantasy. Maltin wipes out the legend spread by Walter Lantz that Woody Woodpecker was inspired by a woodpecker who hammered away at the roof of his honeymoon ranch, and points out that the honeymoon occurred one year after the production of the cartoon. He also rightfully attributes Felix the Cat to its inventor Otto Messmer, pointing out that Pat Sullivan took all the credit for Messmer's work though giving Sullivan full credit as the promoter.

Leonard Maltin quotes Messmer on the creation of Felix. 'The studio being busy, Sullivan asked me to do one in my spare time at home. I did a quick one showing a black cat being outwitted by a mouse. I used plenty of picture gags.' Messmer had made Felix black because: 'It saves making a lot of outlines, and solid black moves better.'

The feline saga continues in *Before Mickey*. Crafton's book, however, goes further than Maltin and places the films in their cultural and historical context. There are many new and fascinating facts, such as the information that Felix was inspired by Rudyard Kipling's *The Cat That Walked by Himself*. Here, as throughout this excellent book, Crafton uses an illustration to make his point, and the book is entertaining as well as informative.

Previous surveys of animation have concentrated on such pioneers as Emile Cohl, Winsor McCay and J. Stuart Blackton to the detriment of lesser known but no less important figures. Crafton has not fallen into this trap; for the first time in a history of animation, the British pioneers such as Walter Booth, Arthur Melbourne Cooper and Anson Dyer receive their critical dues and there are good chapters on the early European animators such as Ladislav Starevitch, although it would be helpful if Crafton could be consistent in the spelling of Starevitch's name, which varies even on one page.

American cartoons are also the subject of *The Encyclopaedia of Animated Cartoon Series*, which is not as well written or illustrated as either of the above books. It has many errors, including assigning Felix to Pat Sullivan (I should note here that there is a correct caption on page 15 that Otto Messmer, misspelt, did create Pat

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Felix: contentious cat.

Sullivan's Felix. This is opposite the 'statement' that 'By 1920, Sullivan had created his most famous silent animated film star Felix the Cat.' On page 118 Felix is described as 'the famed Pat Sullivan character'. And the book revives the legend of the Walter Lantz honeymoon woodpecker, rightly noting that this was in 1941 while equally correctly noting that the first episode was in 1940.

The book is confusingly laid out. It feels as if the facts have come from various lists and have been thrown together. It is expensive, poorly produced and contains little that cannot be found in the Maltin book, apart from the lists of American TV series. If you need to know every episode of *Scooby Doo* or *The Flintstones*, then you will find a use for it.

For further insights into American animation, I can thoroughly recommend *The American Animated Cartoon*, a series of essays by historians and film-makers. It is in several sections—the Early History one includes two good John Canemaker essays on Winsor McCay and John R. Bray and

a hilarious essay by E. E. Cummings, *Miracles and Dreams*. Cummings, obviously a dedicated fan of the cartoons of his period, finds much more in them than mere gags.

'All aboard for Slumberville! We are now asleep, without (of course) having ceased to be awake. Given this purely miraculous condition, such trifles as impossibility don't trouble us at all; everything (even a banana) being "really" something else. Let contradictions contradict—to the pure all things are impure, but we, by heaven, understand our dream symbols, will you kindly look at that mouse, I mean cat—that is, dog! Anyway, whatever it is, it wears pants, and he's got a tough break: his best beloved has just been abducted to the top story of a skyscraper which is even now shimmying with her screams. In vain does her would-be rescuer thunder at the portcullis, the shimmying skyscraper will not let him in. Something must be done—something scientific, miraculous! But is the potential avenger of outraged virtue a scientist, a miracle man? He is—and Lady Chatterley's Lover to boot. For, with one hand pulling his pants free from his stomach, he seizes with the other hand his long black flowing tail (which fortunately becomes at this moment a rigid crank) and winds it vigorously: causing a ladder (sic) of strictly miraculous or scientific proportions to mount from his humble pants up, up, up, even unto the tiptopmost story of the skyscraper! And the day of days is saved...'

ANTOINETTE MOSES

LETTERS

Top Ten

SIR,—I refer to pages 244-245 of the Fiftieth Anniversary issue. The third still from the left in the sequence of six is not that of a scene from *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*. The still shows Stéphane Audran, Michel Piccoli and Claude Piéplu in a scene from Claude Chabrol's *Les Noces Rouges*, titled here as *Blood Wedding*.

The only other point is the Critics' Lists. Three from *Time Out* and all the quality newspapers represented bar the *Daily* and *Sunday Telegraphs*. And what about Tom Hutchinson in the Ham and High? No question of bias surely?

Yours faithfully,
IAN MACAVOY
London NW1

off: viz that the world's film critics are an ageing breed and there consequently wouldn't be a lot of changes from the 1972 poll.

On the other hand, I am saddened to see some fine films of the past fifteen years getting no mention at all in your critics' lists. Didn't anybody like *Raging Bull*, *The Outlaw Josey Wales*, *The Tin Drum*, *Eraserhead*, *Body Heat*, *Breaking Away*, *Don Giovanni*, *Winstanley* (Brownlow), *A Jury of Her Peers* (Sally Heckell) or the Bill Douglas Trilogy? Or have they got to wait till the 2002 poll for belated recognition from a new generation of critics?

Your faithfully,
DEREK MORGAN
Derby

It should perhaps have been made clear in the introduction to the 'Top Ten' feature that we approached about 200 critics and received answers from roughly 60 per cent of them; Letters were sent to the critics of both the *Daily* and *Sunday Telegraph*.—
EDITOR

SIR,—As one of the winners of the Kaleidoscope/SIGHT AND SOUND Top Ten Forecast Competition and recipient of David Wilson's excellent anniversary selection, I am delighted that my hunch paid

Nottingham

SIR,—It was good to read of Tim Pulleine's visits to the provinces (SIGHT AND SOUND, Summer 1982). I am sure that many will welcome more accounts of life north of Watford.

With regard to the Nottingham report may I say that while individual views may differ, the Management Committee of Nottingham Film Theatre recognises and is firmly committed to an education role and current plans for the 1982-83 season provide both for weekend schools and courses of film study.

Yours faithfully,
JOHN ROBSON
Chairman

Nottingham Film Theatre

Angel

SIR,—Neil Jordan's debut feature *Angel* was mentioned *passim* in the Autumn 1982 issue of SIGHT AND SOUND and speculation made about its chances of achieving UK theatrical release. I am pleased to report that the BFI itself has acquired the film for British distribution and it is playing to good attendances at two London cinemas. In recognition of the importance of prior theatrical exhibition, Channel 4 has agreed to delay its transmission of *Angel* until well into 1983 and this period will allow the film to be

screened widely through the network of British Film Institute supported cinemas.

Tim Pulleine's review of *Angel* contains two errors which should be corrected: the singer of the band is played by Honor Hefferman, not Veronica Quilligan, and the flat visited by Danny is not his mother's, but that belonging to his Auntie Mae.

Yours faithfully,
NIGEL ALGAR

Head of BFI Film & Video Library

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

WILLIAM FEAVER is art critic of the *Observer* ... KAROL KULIK is the author of *Alexander Korda: The Man Who Could Work Miracles* and director of the London Multi-Media Market ... MARI KUTTNA, film critic for the *Lady*, has been appointed programme director of the Melbourne Film Festival ... JAMES ROY MACBEAN contributes to *Film Quarterly* and has written the book *Film and Revolution* ... JAMES PARK is a London-based freelance journalist who writes for *Variety* ... GILBERTO PEREZ has been awarded a Mellon Faculty Fellowship in the Humanities at Harvard University, and is working on a book of film essays ... ANDREW ROBINSON is a publisher and freelance film critic with a particular interest in India.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

COLUMBIA-EMI-WARNER for

Gandhi.

EMI/BFI PUBLISHING for *Ealing Posters*.

UIP for *E.T.: the Extra-Terrestrial*, *Diner*.

ARTIFICIAL EYE for *Hammett*, *Trafic*, *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, *Los Olvidados*, *Diary of a Chambermaid*.

CINEGATE for *Giro City*, *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*, *The Third Generation*, *Germany in Autumn*, *Mother Küsters' Trip to Heaven*.

CONTEMPORARY FILMS for *Bleak Moments*.

GALA FILM DISTRIBUTORS for *Le Beau Mariage*, *Despair*.

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ENIGMA PRODUCTIONS for *Secrets*, *P'Tang*, *Yang*, *Kipperbang*.

MERCHANT IVORY PRODUCTIONS for *Heat and Dust*.

MOVING PICTURE COMPANY for *The Bad Sister*.

PORTMAN PRODUCTIONS for *Ill Fares the Land*.

RECORDED PICTURE COMPANY for *Merry Christmas*, *Mr Lawrence*.

UMBRELLA FILMS for *Another Time*, *Another Place*.

MGM for *Julius Caesar*.

HORIZONS PRODUCTIONS/FILMS A2/SFPC for *Les Fantômes du Chapelier*.

MARION'S FILMS/INA (Paris)/ZDF (Mainz) for *One Man's War*.

PLANET-FILM/GAUMONT for

Querelle.

RAI for *Nostalgia*.

TVE/AGATA FILM for *La Colmena*.

JONATHAN CAPE/JERRY BAUER for photograph of Roland Barthes.

RADIO TIMES for *Hard Labour*, *Grown Ups*, *Intensive Care*.

RADIO TIMES/DON SMITH for *Abigail's Party*, *Nuts in May*.

LONDON MULTI-MEDIA MARKET for poster.

BFI FILM & VIDEO LIBRARY for *Hero*.

NFA STILL COLLECTION for *M Hulot's Holiday*, *Sylvie et le Fantôme*, *Jour de Fête*, *Mon Oncle*, *Playtime*, *Le Beau Serge*, *Ivan the Terrible*, *Un Chien Andalou*, *Land without Bread*.

NFA STILL COLLECTION/JAMES PATTERSON for *Lusitania* film.

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●ANOTHER WAY

(Cinegate)

The veteran Károly Makk's cool, distanced observation of Hungary after the Rising—the microcosm is a political journal, *The Truth*, in the offices of which two very different women find themselves sharing a room, getting by, kicking against the pricks. *Another Way* is most remarkable for the way it details, chiefly in telling minutiae, the travails of the nation, the exigencies of bureaucracy, through the course of a tragic love affair between the women. Handsomely photographed by Tamas Andor, with a controlled clarity which fixes Makk's tone, the film is further distinguished by a remarkable performance by the Polish actress Jadwiga Jankowska-Cieslak, as the more radical of the two women: the pain of her inability to compromise is evident in her whole being, and her face expresses a sorrow and resilience which is impossible to forget. (Grażyna Szapolowska.)

●THE LAST MOVIE

(ICA Projects)

This Western-at-the-end-of-its-tether is not as apocalyptic as the title makes it sound—it's more an exercise in trying to start from scratch—although it nearly proved a terminal undertaking for Dennis Hopper. Shot in the early 70s, back to back with *Easy Rider*, it went on to win first prize at the Venice festival and then to be cast into oblivion by Universal, who were not amused by the unravelling narrative or a cast increasingly given to jumping through Pirandellian hoops (the breaking point came when Hopper refused, as a last resort, to tidy things up by killing off his own character). But the point seems to be that Hopper (playing Kansas, a Hollywood stuntman who stays on in a Peruvian village when the film unit moves out) cannot die. Or at least he cannot achieve that perfect fusion of art and life clearly symbolised for the director by James Dean—whose 'method' Hopper is still hung up on and who is represented here by one of Hopper's company of actor friends ('Dean' Stockwell). A funny, fragmented view from inside the movie process, *The Last Movie* is a fascinating act of deconstruction, even if it can't finally put itself all together. (Samuel Fuller, Don Gordon, Tomas Milian.)

ANGEL

(BFI)

A stylised revenge thriller, elliptically written and directed by newcomer Neil Jordan and beautifully shot by Chris Menges, set in a Northern Ireland where political angst has been

translated into religious fervour. Traces of executive producer John Boorman's *Point Blank*, but the film bears a strange fruit all its own. (Stephen Rea, Veronica Quilligan.)

AUTHOR! AUTHOR!

(Fox)

Some nice jokes as the marital difficulties of a Broadway playwright are rhymed with his problems in getting his latest effort staged. Subsequently turns into a sentimental re-run of *Kramer vs Kramer*, with hubby battling for the kids while the women in his life drift selfishly away. (Al Pacino, Dyan Cannon; director, Arthur Hiller.)

CARBON COPY

(Enterprise)

A throwback comedy, about a ghost from the past—though a blacker shade of ghost—who causes hero George Segal to be cast out of his *echt* WASP paradise. The one-liners about race and social privilege occasionally have a bite that lifts this out of the *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* era, but Michael Schultz's direction is less adventurous. (Susan Saint James, Denzel Washington.)

CREEPSHOW

(Alpha)

Depressingly statutory omnibus of horror comic stories, written by Stephen King and directed by George A. Romero, but looking like leftovers from the old Amicus series. (Leslie Nielsen, Hal Holbrook, E. G. Marshall.)

CRYSTAL GAZING

(BFI)

Peter Wollen and Laura Mulvey's latest film for the BFI Production Board attempts to deal with various characters struggling against a backdrop of Thatcherite recession. But Wollen and Mulvey's dabbling in narrative falls victim to a collage structure: the performances don't meet the dramatic demands which in turn lose out to other sorts of performance (music, puppets, monologue, etc). (Gavin Richards, Lora Logic.)

DEAD MEN DON'T WEAR PLAID

(UIP)

Great idea to use old 40s clips so that Lake, Ladd, Stanwyck et al are pressganged as supporting cast for a new thriller. The context provided for them is undergraduate facetiousness at its worst, but at least the extracts make a pleasant *noir* anthology. (Steve Martin, Rachel Ward, Carl Reiner; director, Carl Reiner.)

EATING RAOUL

(Virgin)

Sado-masochism and old wine, or how a sweet middle-class couple attain their life's dream—a restaurant in the country—by pandering to the perversions of the big city and then doing away with the perverses. The kind of black comedy that charms rather than provokes, like an extension of TV's *Soap*. (Paul Bartel, Mary Woronov, Robert Beltran; director, Paul Bartel.)

FIVE DAYS ONE SUMMER

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Fred Zinnemann's film about strange triangular love in the Swiss alps of 1932; dawdling and

eventually silly, though the veteran director's tenacity and craftsmanship deserve muted applause. Bracing location photography by Giuseppe Rotunno. (Sean Connery, Betsy Brantley, Lambert Wilson.)

GIRO CITY

(Cinegate)

Worthy political thriller-cum-exposé of TV politics, which directs a good deal of bile at the smooth ways of the media manipulators (made by ex-current affairs documentarist Karl Francis). But the casting of stars (Glenda Jackson, Jon Finch) and the drift of the story reduces the issues to easy rhetoric. (Kenneth Colley.)

HIGH RISK

(Enterprise)

No one escapes caricature in this Colombian caper: James Brolin and a trio of amateur buccaneers doing their best to thumb their noses at drug-dealing king-pin James Coburn. Stewart Raffill, best known for his children's pictures, dithers over the tone of what proves a rather old-fashioned venture. (Bruce Davison, Lindsay Wagner.)

A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC

(Barber)

Stephen Sondheim's transposition of Ingmar Bergman's *Smiles of a Summer Night* expires in the transition from stage to screen: Harold Prince directed as if for a chocolate-box stage in 1977, with Elizabeth Taylor woefully unconvincing as the actress at the crossroads. (Diana Rigg, Len Cariou, Lesley-Anne Down.)

THE LOVELESS

(Mainline)

A motorcycle gang's disruptive visit to a small Southern town in 1959, presented in a frigid style that spotlights the period artefacts but reduces the characters to ciphers. Loveless indeed. (William Defoe, Robert Gordon, Tina L'Hotzky; directors, Kathryn Bigelow, Monty Montgomery.)

THE MAN WITH THE DEADLY LENS

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Sean Connery as an ace TV reporter uncovering wild skulduggery involving oil deals, atom bombs, Arab terrorists and the CIA. Intended as a sharply cynical overview of the current political scene, bristling with relevant reference points but emerging as a drearily murky thriller. (George Grizzard, John Saxon, Henry Silva; director, Richard Brooks.)

MY FAVOURITE YEAR

(UIP)

After plunging the audience back in time to 1954 and the 'Golden Age' of American television, Richard Benjamin's comedy—his first as director—annoyingly fails to build on its background and drifts into sentimentality. But Peter O'Toole's swashbuckling, boozy actor staggers through pleasantly. (Mark Linn-Baker, Jessica Harper, Joseph Bologna.)

NIGHT SHIFT

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Engaging premise about a Wall Street analyst who seeks refuge from the pressures as a night shift attendant at the morgue,

only to be befriended by a manic ideas man who soon has him turning the place into a co-operative for prostitutes. But the steam runs out of both script and direction. (Henry Winkler, Michael Keaton, Shelley Long; director, Ron Howard.)

PRIVILEGED

(ITC)

Made by Oxford undergraduates, about Oxford undergraduates, this independent feature combines great ingenuity in the making with a dreary, much-told tale about how one bright young thing receives his comeuppance. A student production of *The Duchess of Malfi* scarcely helps to broaden the scope of the film. (Robert Woolley, Diana Katis, Hughie Grant.)

RAGGEDY MAN

(Cannon)

Sissy Spacek turns in a beautifully modulated performance of quiet desperation in a quiet Texas town during the war. Unfortunately, the film surrounds her with an unquiet hodge-podge of romance (the handsome sailor who fills a gap in her life) and menace (psychopathic brothers leering on the sidelines). (Eric Roberts, Sam Shepard; director, Jack Fisk.)

THE RETURN OF THE SOLDIER

(Fox)

Careful, rather well acted adaptation of Rebecca West's novella about an amnesiac who returns from the trenches of the First World War to find three women jostling for first place in his memory. Let down by its clodhopping intimations of the role played by class. (Glenda Jackson, Julie Christie, Ann-Margret, Alan Bates; director, Alan Bridges.)

SCRUBBERS

(Handmade)

Neatly stereotyped 'problem' characters put through the hoop of Mai Zetterling's calling-card feminist social conscience. Despite its pretensions, *Scrubbers* ends up trading on the sensationalism—of jailed women/lesbianism/violence, all bundled indistinguishably together—it purports to spurn. (Amanda York, Chrissie Cotterill.)

STILL OF THE NIGHT

(UIP)

Robert Benton's thriller has Roy Scheider as a psychiatrist becoming spellbound by Meryl Streep, who may or may not be a throat-slashing psychopath. But a cluster of Hitchcock 'references' cannot compensate for the flatness of both plotting and direction, or the miscasting of Streep herself, who radiates blankness rather than ambiguity.

TRAIL OF THE PINK PANTHER

(UIP)

Having disappeared from the last two instalments, the 'pink panther' diamond resurfaces here. But Inspector Clouseau himself is only tentatively present: using left-over material from the other films, Blake Edwards has cobbled together a story in the wake of Peter Sellers' death that combines ghoulishness with a delirious defiance of all continuity. (David Niven, Herbert Lom.)

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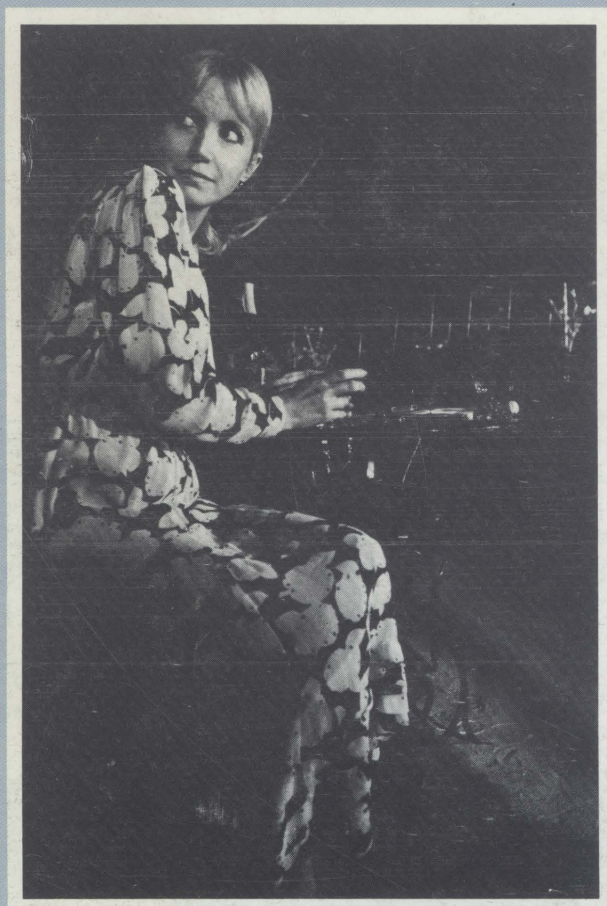
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